

THUCYDIDES

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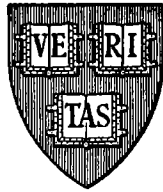
THUCYDIDES

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FOREWORD

THIS book had long been planned and was half written when an invitation came to deliver a series of lectures on Thucydides before the Lowell Institute in Boston early in 1942. Parts of it were used, though in a somewhat different form, for that purpose — beneficially, it is hoped, since lectures encourage a clarity and simplicity no doubt still wanting, yet never more to be encouraged than in a book on this proverbially opaque author.

The translations are only as close as an attempt to achieve normal usage allowed. The limited notes are intended chiefly for readers unacquainted with Thucydidean scholarship. Those who are so acquainted are earnestly referred to three articles, written in preparation for this book, which expound in detail the point of view taken in it. These are: "Euripides and Thucydides," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 49 (1938), pp. 23–68; "The Origins of Thucydides' Style," *ibid.*, 50 (1939), pp. 35–84; and "The Unity of Thucydides' History," *Athenian Studies, ibid.*, Supplementary Volume I (1940), pp. 255–298.

I wish to express my thanks to the Trustees of the Lowell Institute and my indebtedness to my colleagues, not least Professors C. N. Jackson and A. D. Nock. I owe a further heavy debt to Dr. Paul J. Alexander for his help in the preparation of the index.

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CHAPTER I

LIFE AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Thucydides of Athens wrote this history describing the course of the war between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians. He embarked on it at the outbreak of hostilities, because he foresaw that the conflict would be widespread in character and far more notable than any that had previously occurred. His reasons for so thinking were not only that both sides entered the war at the height of their strength but that he observed the rest of the Greek states already supporting one side or the other, either openly or in intention. This war was in fact the greatest upheaval ever to affect the Greek, as well as portions of the non-Greek, world — indeed, one had almost said, the majority of mankind.

WITH THESE WORDS Thucydides, the son of Olorus, sometime after 404 B.C. when the long and exhausting war between Athens and Sparta had come to an end and he himself was probably about fifty-five years old, began his famous *History*.¹ Even these first sentences suggest something of his work and reveal certain characteristic traits of his mind. They convey his

¹ No certain title for the work derives from Thucydides himself. He uses the term *συγγράφειν* of his writing (I 1. 1, IV 104. 4), whence the title *Συγγραφή* is commonly inferred. Cf. the well-known edition of J. Classen, revised by J. Steup (referred to below as Classen-Steup), I, 5th ed., Berlin, 1919, p. xxxiv.

curious mingling of tenseness and austerity, his absorption with political forces, his sense that the events of his time were of a magnitude and complexity never known before. They reveal in him, one feels even here, something of the statesman as well as of the historian: of the statesman, in his express belief that the working of political forces can be calculated in advance and acted on; of the historian, in his ability, now at the end of the war, to relive the period over a quarter of a century earlier when the bitter sequence of events that led to Athens' downfall was about to unroll. Most significant of all, they reveal a mind which consciously concerned itself not with some storied era of the brilliant past but with the harsh and shattering present.

To ourselves in this period of the world's history these sentences convey something still more familiar. This is true in particular of the historian's statement that he foresaw the gravity of the war because both sides entered upon it at the height of their strength. In the *History* one encounters not only a mind realistically concerned with the interplay of political forces; one encounters also a world in which armed nationalism is at its height, and in which the conflict of two major powers, each supported by a number of smaller states, touches off at last a huge conflagration. It is often and justly said that each generation must study afresh the great authors of the past, because each will find in them certain qualities which its predecessors overlooked or failed to emphasize, and the statement has a special force in regard to Thucydides. We may feel with special urgency that his work is not something to be read out of piety or because

of its fame, but because it is the legacy of an extraordinarily acute observer, an Athenian possessing like many of his fellow citizens the highest degree of political competence and insight, who wrote when his state had passed through a period of military conflict and social unrest, the like of which we have known.

It will be well to begin with some account of Thucydides' life, though any such account must be peculiarly bare even by comparison with the sparse biographies of other fifth-century authors. The three *vitae*² which have come down from Byzantine times are full of confusion and probably of error. At least, any information which they offer can be trusted only insofar as it jibes with the rare and guarded statements which he makes of himself, with characteristic reserve, in the *History*. Unlike his celebrated contemporaries, he evidently had no fame in his own day — as was inevitable, since he spent twenty years in exile from Athens and died before completing the one work on which his fame rests. Thus it is natural that no such contemporary impressions of him exist — or probably ever existed — as Ion's of Sophocles, Aristophanes' of Euripides, or Plato's and Xenophon's of Socrates. Moreover, although he exerted a very considerable influence on the historians of the next century³ and was known to Demosthenes and Isocrates,

² Two come down in the MSS, the longer, itself a compilation of three separate accounts, being ascribed to one Marcellinus. The third is in the lexicon of Suidas.

³ At least three continuations of Thucydides' unfinished work were written in the course of the fourth century: the extant *Hellenica* of Xenophon, the *Hellenica* of Theopompus, who was better known for his eulogistic history of Philip of Macedon, and the work to which the fragments of the

it apparently remained for him to achieve his greatest reputation in the period of the early Roman empire.⁴ It would seem that history is most appreciated as an art when the hot fires of poetic and philosophic creativeness have subsided among a people and men are less concerned to influence the present than to explore the past. In any case, it is certain that Thucydides' fame grew slowly among the ancients and that by the time it reached its height any considerable tradition about his life had vanished.

But however little is known of Thucydides in a detailed way, much surely must be said to be known of any Athenian as sensitive as he to the currents of thought and politics in the latter half of the fifth century. Not only his politics but his style and, more generally, his outlook inevitably place him in some relationship to his contemporaries, and the closeness or distance of the tie

so-called *Hellenica* of *Oxyrhynchus* belonged (*Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, V, no. 842. The authorship and character of these fragments covering events of the year 396/5 are brilliantly discussed by H. Bloch, "Studies in Historical Literature of the Fourth Century B.C.," in *Athenian Studies*, *Harv. Stud. in Class. Philol.*, Suppl. Vol. I, pp. 303-334. He also offers, p. 316, n. 4, the most recent comment on the obscure Cratippus, mentioned by Dionysius, *On Thucydides* 16, as another continuator of the *History*). Unlike the author of these fragments, Theopompus abandoned Thucydides' careful annalistic methods. Together with his older contemporary Ephorus, he evidently adapted to historiography the rhetorical ideals of their teacher Isocrates. (For Ephorus' universal history, which underlies the extant work of Diodorus Siculus, cf. G. L. Barber, *The Historian Ephorus*, Cambridge, 1935.) Of fourth-century historians, the Sicilian Philistus was felt by the ancients to be closest to Thucydides in style (Cicero, *de Oratore*, II 13, 57. Dionysius, *To Pompeius* 5. Quintilian, X 1. 74). Except for Xenophon's *Hellenica*, the extant work which most clearly betrays Thucydides' influence is perhaps the manual *On Siegework* by Aeneas Tacticus, almost certainly of the middle fourth century.

⁴ The subject is further discussed in Chapter VII.

tells, in a sense, equally much. Thus it should ideally be possible to combine the sparse facts of Thucydides' personal life with the far more abundant indications of his intellectual attitude, and to relate the two not only to each other but to what is otherwise known of the main currents of contemporary thought. By so doing, one might hope to see his work in relation to the Athens and the Greece from which it sprang, and to follow to some extent the forces which made the *History* what it is. No man can create anything great out of himself alone but only by giving form to what already exists formless about him. Certainly in few periods of the world's history have new ideas — in government, in art, in morality — pressed more thickly about men than in the Athens which Thucydides knew. The unfading instructiveness of the Greeks derives perhaps chiefly from the fact that almost all the characteristic attitudes of western man occurred freshly and with a certain pristine force to their creative minds. This general ferment of thought, this contemporary sense of being on the verge of new insight into man and society, is ultimately what gives Thucydides' book its power and makes of it not merely the history of twenty years of war but a treatise on the nature of freedom and authority, of material progress and social decay, backed by the experience of a generation. Thus after a few words on his life, we shall consider first the political and then the intellectual forces which molded the thought of this brilliant man and left their imprint on his work. "Le style est l'homme même," said Buffon. But in an equally true sense, "le style est l'âge."

Thucydides speaks of himself on four occasions in the *History*: first at the start, to say that he undertook his work at the outbreak of the war, and to explain why he did so; then, in the course of his description of the great plague, to state that he himself fell ill.⁵ The third passage, which occurs in the account of the campaign in Thrace in the late summer and autumn of 424, is more revealing.⁶ After stating that he was one of the ten Athenian generals of that year, he describes how, apparently through no fault of his own but because he had only seven ships at his disposal, he failed to relieve the important commercial town of Amphipolis, then being attacked by the Spartan general Brasidas. In this passage he adds two important facts: that his father's name was Olorus,⁷ and that he exercised influence among the natives of the district — presumably local Thracians — because he operated certain gold mines there. Finally, in the so-called second introduction,⁸ prefaced to the narrative following the Peace of Nicias, he states that he was exiled from Athens because of his failure at Amphipolis, that the period of exile lasted twenty years, and that during that time he had opportunity to consort with both sides. Speaking of the whole twenty-seven years of war from 431 to 404, he adds, "I lived through it in its entirety at a time of life when my observation

⁵ II 48. 3.

⁶ IV 104. 4, 105. 1.

⁷ Doubt has been cast on this fact by W. K. Prentice (*The Ancient Greeks*, Princeton, 1940, pp. 186-190), on the ground that the text is slightly confused at this place. But the confusion hardly justifies his inference that the name Olorus is a later addition.

⁸ V 26.

was mature and with the fixed purpose of gathering accurate information." Other statements cast light on his methods and opinions, but these form the substance of what we know about him personally.

The most important of these facts from a biographical point of view is his father's name, Olorus, a name of Thracian origin otherwise unattested at Athens. It is known from Herodotus⁹ that the great Miltiades, later the victor of Marathon, while tyrant in earlier life of the town of Cardiapolis on the Hellespont, married the daughter of a local king likewise named Olorus. She was named Hegesipyle, and became the mother of the famous Cimon, later the builder of the Delian Confederacy and Pericles' predecessor as the leading man in Athens. It therefore follows almost irresistibly that Thucydides was related through his father to Miltiades and Cimon, the name Olorus having been carried down in the family according to the Greek practice, and this conclusion is strengthened by the fact that he possessed property and influence in Thrace. Indeed, when he was elected general in 424 to serve there, he was, to all indications, a comparatively young and obscure man. Hence it seems likely that he owed his office to these same Thracian ties, just as, four years before, Asopius the son of Phormio had been elected and sent as general to Acarnania at the express request of the natives who had dealt with his father.¹⁰ A long list of instances could be adduced to show how Athens habitually made use of citizens possessed of special experience in one or another part of the Greek world. If, further, Thucydides lived

⁹ VI 39. 2.

¹⁰ III 7. 1.

on in Thrace, as tradition had it, through twenty years of exile — and to support his study and travel through this long period he must seemingly have possessed property somewhere outside of Athenian jurisdiction ¹¹— then the readiest explanation is once again that he had come by this property in some way connected with his family.

Nor have modern scholars been the first to reach such conclusions. On the contrary, Thucydides' connection with Miltiades and Cimon is assumed in all the *vitae*, which state further that his tomb or cenotaph (and which it was, was disputed) was to be seen in Athens among the so-called monuments of Cimon outside the Melite gate in the hollow between the Pnyx and the hill of the Muses on the way to the Piraeus. This fact, known and accepted by Plutarch,¹² rests on the fairly good authority of one Polemon,¹³ a peripatetic of the second century B.C., who wrote what was apparently one of the first and best historical guidebooks to Athens. But the *vitae*, as was said, are so confused and self-contradictory as to have in themselves almost no authority, and when therefore it is further stated by Marcellinus¹⁴ that Thucydides got his property from a rich Thracian wife rather than from his family (though the latter fact had earlier been assumed), the story carries little weight. Similarly, the statement that he had a

¹¹ Since the exact nature of Thucydides' sentence is unknown, there is perhaps some uncertainty whether his property was confiscated. But that is the natural assumption. Cf. Busolt, *Griech. Geschichte*, III, 2, p. 625, n. 1, where the subject is discussed at length.

¹² *Cimon* 4.

¹³ Marcellinus, 17.

¹⁴ Contrast Marcellinus, 14 and 19.

daughter who completed the eighth book¹⁵ is apparently a fiction inspired by the incomplete state of that book.

On the other hand, certain other statements of the *vitae* are more interesting, in that they seem consistent with what is said by Thucydides himself and thus may possibly represent fragments of a genuine tradition. The first are the statements about his grave or cenotaph. Now Thucydides gives the length of his exile as exactly twenty years, that is from 424 to 404, which suggests that he returned to Athens at its expiration, coinciding with the end of the war. Why otherwise would he have recorded the exact length of his exile? Moreover, he speaks as if he had observed certain sights in Athens after the war—for instance, the ruins of the long walls¹⁶—and study in any case would seem to have demanded his return. If so, he may well have been buried at Athens, and there seems nothing inherently impossible in the epitaph giving also his father's name and his deme, "Thucydides the son of Olorus of Halimus,"¹⁷ which is recorded in the *vitae*. How the other traditions arose that he died in Thrace or was murdered, and that the grave was consequently a cenotaph, is not known. The murder, as Wilamowitz suggested,¹⁸ might be an even more drastic fiction than the daughter to explain the unfinished state of the *History*.

Then, again, Marcellinus says that he died at somewhat over fifty.¹⁹ The statement conflicts with another

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 43.

¹⁶ I 93. 2.

¹⁷ Marcellinus, 16.

¹⁸ "Die Thukydideslegende," *Hermes* 12 (1877), pp. 326-367.

¹⁹ Marcellinus, 34.

tradition, preserved by Aulus Gellius,²⁰ that he was forty when the war began; but while the latter tradition seems simply to reflect Apollodorus' summary method of fixing a man's *floruit* at some great event in his lifetime, the former statement coincides or seems to coincide with what Thucydides himself says and thus may represent a genuine tradition. It will be recalled that in talking of the length of the war he said that he had lived through it all at a time of life when his observation was mature.²¹ But why, one wonders, should he have said that, unless there could have been some question whether he was too young to have known the beginning or too old to have followed the end? If there was some such question, then the passage can only mean that he was a comparatively young man, but not a youth, at the outbreak, since it is unthinkable that he could have considered himself old at the end, when he was at the very height of his powers and consistently engaged on the *History*. This assumption that he was a young man in 431 is strongly confirmed, if in a somewhat imponderable way, by the whole cast of his thought and style and, in particular, by the violent effect which the sophistic movement had upon him. All men reflect the climate of opinion in their times, and, as the further course of this and the next chapter will try to make clear, the Athens in which Thucydides' mind was formed was not that of the period when Pericles was winning his early reforms and the city was in the first confident flush of full democracy. It was the Athens of Pericles' later period, when the great statesman had become almost a conserva-

²⁰ XV 23.

²¹ V 26.

tive in comparison with the leaders of a still more extreme democracy and when the sophists were phrasing for young men a new and less idealistic mood of political realism.

If he was a young man in 431, how young could he have been? He was elected a general in 424, and, though no law is known prescribing a minimum age for the office, still only men over thirty were eligible as members of the Council,²² and it seems improbable that the generalship could have been held at an earlier age. Alcibiades, at least, who was general for the first time in 420/19, was still considered young for the office at the time of the Sicilian expedition.²³ Yet his father was killed at Coronea in 447, and he won the crown of valor at Potidaea in 432. He must therefore have been born around 450 and have been in his middle thirties when he sailed for Syracuse. Thus Thucydides must seemingly have been at least thirty in 424, or probably a little older, which would mean that he was born around 460 or a little after, and that Marcellinus' statement that he died in his fifties may be substantially correct. If so, he was more than a generation younger than Pericles and Sophocles and some twenty-five years younger than Euripides. Midway in age between Socrates, born in 469, and Alcibiades, like them, he never knew the glorious confidence of the defeat of Persia and the founding of the Delian Confederacy. Rather, he would have heard as a boy that peace had been made with Persia and would have seen the Confederacy already hardening into the Empire and already feared and attacked by

²² Aristotle. *Constitution of Athens* 4. 3.

²³ VI 12. 2.

Sparta and her allies. If he was reared — as doubtless he was — in the tradition of Salamis, yet as he grew to manhood he would have understood more and more of the problems and dangers of an empire maintained over increasingly unwilling subjects by a democracy which itself, being new to Greek experience, aroused great hopes and equally great misgivings.

Only one or two further statements of the ancient *vitae* remain to be mentioned, notably that the mine which he operated in Thrace was the famous Σκαπτὴ Ὕλη, “dug-out woodland,” on Mount Pangaeon opposite Thasos, and that it was there that he lived through his exile. Indeed, a plane tree was pointed out under which he was said to have worked on his *History*.²⁴ It is hard to tell how much truth there is in the story. On the one hand, he himself tells²⁵ that at the time of the revolt of Thasos in 463 Cimon took over the mines operated by the Thasians on the mainland, among which, says Herodotus,²⁶ who himself had been there, was Σκαπτὴ Ὕλη. Presumably, then, the mine would have become state property, and Thucydides would merely have leased the right to operate it. But if so, it is hard to see how he could have stayed on there after his exile. On the other hand, it is clear that through the first two-thirds of the fifth century, Athenian control did not extend very far inland from the Thracian coast. Amphipolis, the trading town some three miles inland which Thucydides lost to Brasidas, had been founded only in 437, after two previous colonies had been cut to pieces by the natives,

²⁴ Marcellinus, 25.

²⁵ I 101. 3.

²⁶ VI 46. 3.

and, as is clear from repeated remarks in the *History*,²⁷ the local tribes continued to be of sufficient importance to be courted by both sides during the war. It might be, therefore, that the property owned by Thucydides had never fallen under Athenian control but came to him from his native ties. That would explain how he continued to reside there after his exile, though in that case it is hard to see how his place of residence could have been Σκαπτὴ ᾿Τλη, which, as has been noted, apparently became Athenian. Possibly tradition falsely associated Thucydides' mines with those at Σκαπτὴ ᾿Τλη because the latter continued to be well-known, as is clear from mention of them three and a half centuries later by Lucretius.

But that Thucydides continued to live somewhere in the district seems confirmed by his abundant and detailed knowledge of this whole northern part of the Greek world.²⁸ And that fact leads to a final statement of Marcellinus²⁹ connecting him with other literary men of Greece who visited the court of the Macedonian king Archelaus. Tradition gives him as the author of a well-known epigram on Euripides,³⁰ who died in Macedon in 406, and, although the ascription is no doubt false, the general tradition that Thucydides was there and knew Euripides may be correct. At least, he goes out of his way to speak with admiration of the military reforms of Archelaus,³¹ who in these years was

²⁷ Cf. IV 107, V 6.

²⁸ Esp. II 95-101.

²⁹ 29-30. Cf. R. Hirzel, *Hermes* 13 (1878), pp. 46-49.

³⁰ *Anthologia Palatina* VII 45.

³¹ II 100.

laying the foundation of the later power of Macedon. The passage is interesting in several ways. No neater contrast exists between Thucydides' view of society and that of Plato than in their attitude towards this ruthless but powerful man, who to Thucydides has the distinction of creating a strong state but to Plato remains a harsh symbol of tyranny.³² But the passage has also been used to give a *terminus post quem* for the death of Thucydides, on the probably admissible assumption that he nowhere sums up the achievements of a living man and that, since Archelaus died in 399, the passage must have been written after that. This reasoning, unsatisfactory as it is, gives the only indication of when he died, apart from the tradition that he was still in his fifties at the time of his death. That he survived the war is evident from the *History*, but that he died abruptly not many years after 404 seems equally clear from the fact that his narrative does not cover the whole twenty-seven years of war, as he expressly states that it would,³³ but breaks off suddenly with the events of the twenty-first year.

So much, then, concerning the life of Thucydides can be pieced together with varying degrees of likelihood by combining what he himself says with the traditions about him current in later antiquity. A few more inferences will be made as we turn to consider his life in connection with the history of his age, but the essential facts about him are clear. These are the following. He was very probably related through his father Olorus to the wealthy and conservative clan of the Philaidæ, the clan

³² *Gorgias* 470d-471d.

³³ V 26. 1.

of Miltiades and Cimon, but he was born, probably around 460, at a time when the power of all such great conservative families, and this one in particular, was receding before the flowing tide of Athenian democracy. He was nevertheless sufficiently interested and sufficiently active in politics not only to have foreseen the significance of the war in 431, and to have resolved to record its progress, but actually to have been elected general in the year 424. He must have owed his election, in part at least, to his knowledge of the district of Thrace around Amphipolis, where he owned or leased mines. It may therefore be that his family had long had interests there, since Miltiades had married a Thracian princess, the daughter of the original Olorus, and since the historian, as tradition had it, was able to retire to Thrace after his failure to relieve Amphipolis, as a result of which he was exiled from Athens. His exile lasted twenty years,³⁴ during which time he evidently traveled widely — for instance, he must have visited Syracuse — but he seemingly returned to Athens after the end of the war, at the time when he was writing his *History*. He probably did not survive the war by many years, since the *History* is incomplete. In later times an inscription existed on what was purportedly his grave, in the burial place of some of the Philaidae, giving his father's name and his deme.

As one considers these facts in the light of the his-

³⁴ Pausanias (I 23. 9) claims to have seen on the Acropolis an inscription containing a decree by one Oenobius (who has been identified as the son of Thucydides' colleague Eucles mentioned in IV 104. 4) moving the historian's recall. For a discussion of its significance, cf. G. Busolt, *Hermes* 33 (1898), pp. 336-340. If Thucydides returned after the surrender of Athens in the

tory of his age and of his own opinions, a few wider conclusions, some of them most interesting and revealing, seem to follow. In the first place, as a youth born into the center of events at Athens and destined, as he must have thought, one day to play a significant part in them himself, Thucydides could never have regarded historical movements with either the idealism or the primarily narrative interest of Herodotus. The latter not only lived nearer the exalted days of the Persian Wars but, as an Ionian, lacked that feeling of responsibility for events which is at bottom what impelled Thucydides to scrutinize their meaning so closely. Like the provincial Livy, Herodotus could therefore tell a sweeping story precisely because it is the appearance, not the cause, of events which primarily strikes those who are reared outside a tradition of active statesmanship. Thucydides, on the other hand, shares the realism of Tacitus because, like him, he grew up both in a sceptical age and, what is more important, in a political atmosphere. The same fact appears in what he says³⁵ of a still closer contemporary than Herodotus, Hellanicus of Lesbos, one of whose many works traced the history of Athens from its mythical origins through the fifth century. Thucydides found the latter's treatment of the period since the Persian Wars both inaccurate and, what was worse, devoid of any real explanation of the growth of Athens, defects which he himself set out to remedy in his famous digression on the period of fifty years be-

spring of 404, his exile would have lasted a full twenty years only if he reckoned in his months of office as general in 424.

³⁵ I 97. 2.

tween the Persian and Peloponnesian wars.³⁶ Clearly, one of the qualities which was to distinguish his mind from that of any contemporary, and almost any later, historian was its intense, realistic concern for the political and social causes of events, and there can be little question that he acquired this fundamental attitude from his early acquaintance with the politics of Periclean Athens. The parallel of Plato's youth, in many ways close, is of further point here. Plato too was a member of one of the governing families of Athens and early conceived hopes of a political career. But though, as he tells,³⁷ he abandoned them in disgust at the conduct of his kinsmen Charmides and Critias during the revolution of the Thirty, the impressions of his youth remained to stamp his life's work. So too with Thucydides, a natural and inherited concern for politics, sharpened as it inevitably was by the example of his kinsmen, can only have brought him face to face even as a youth with the gravity of the contemporary issues.

But if it was natural for him, born as he was into one of the great families of Athens and at this most intense period of the city's political life, to conceive of history in the manner of a statesman as the stern play of calculable forces, it is in another sense to the utmost degree surprising that his own attitude towards the politics of his day is what it is. For, without considering his views here in any detail, it is at once clear that he greatly admired both the policies of Pericles and the united democracy which Pericles represented and that, to his

³⁶ I 89-118.

³⁷ *Letter* VII 324b-326b.

mind, the chief cause of Athens' ultimate defeat was not the strength of Sparta but the rise of faction in Athens herself and the ensuing abandonment of Pericles' temperate policies by his more radical successors. But if, as we saw, Thucydides was almost certainly a close connection of Miltiades and Cimon, surely his admiration for Pericles was a most remarkable thing — how remarkable appears from even the most cursory study of the Athenian politics of the period. And this examination is worth making, not only or primarily because it casts an interesting light on Thucydides and seems to show that as a young man he broke with his traditions to become a democrat and a Periclean, but because it was obviously his deep youthful interest in politics which inspired him, at the very outbreak of the war, to conceive his *History* and which thus influenced its ultimate form. After all, for reasons unknown to us, he may from the beginning have sided with Pericles against his conservative kinsmen, though the solidarity of the family in this period suggests the contrary. But the city of Pericles which he knew before the war remained to the last the standard by which he judged the city of Cleon and of Alcibiades.

If he was born around 460, then his birth would have coincided with the first clear proofs that Athenian policy was henceforth to be controlled by the related facts of democracy and empire. Only two years before, Cimon had persuaded the Athenians to honor the terms of their alliance with Sparta by assisting her against the revolting helots of Messenia. But when the Spartans greeted this gesture with suspicion and the youthful Pericles at

home seized the opportunity to press for the first of his great democratic reforms, namely, the transfer of certain powers from the conservative Areopagus to popular juries, Cimon was ostracized in the resulting test of strength, and this change of leadership inaugurated a sharp change of policy. For the future, Athens was to be more and more controlled, domestically, by the interests of the commercial middle classes as opposed to the landed aristocracy and the farmers and, externally, by the need for maintaining and extending her mastery of the sea. Actually, these two aims are merely facets of the predominant fact of this whole era, the swift growth of Attic sea power in the two decades since Salamis and the changed character of the city following on her new position at the head of the maritime league organized after the Second Persian War, the so-called Delian Confederacy. Clearly, it was the residents of Athens and the Piraeus, rather than the inhabitants of the Attic countryside, who as merchants and ship-builders, sailors and small tradesmen, workers at the docks and minor officials, profited primarily by the growth of the city as a trading metropolis. Unless, therefore, Athens ceased to be such, it was inevitable in the long run that the part of the population on which her power was based should control her policy, both internal and external. Perhaps the dominant impression left by Thucydides — indeed, it was a truism in Greece — is that naval power and democracy were basically related. It seems certain, therefore, that, as he considered the wavering leadership of the conservatives in the Athens of his youth, he must have seen that the

continuing strength of the city as a naval power in fact depended on the widespread vigor and self-trust among the citizens which Pericles, in the Funeral Oration, points to as a fruit of democracy.

There is little evidence on the population of Athens in this period, but, though Thucydides speaks of the countryside as largely rebuilt and reinhabited after the devastation of Xerxes' attack in 480,³⁸ it seems inescapable that many of those who had taken to the ships at Salamis never returned to farming. For through the next decades, to prevent a third Persian invasion, the Confederacy maintained a fleet constantly in being, and when many of the Ionian cities, tiring of the effort, substituted money for ships and men as their contribution to the cause, there was all the more employment for Athenians as sailors and as builders. These men now could not be reabsorbed into the older, primarily agricultural form of life, even if they had wished to be, without shattering the economy of the city. In short, one of those sudden opportunities for expansion which sometimes open before a people had opened before the Athenians in these years. They had seized it and were now committed to the democracy and imperialism which were its fruit and of which Pericles was the prophet.

Such were the conditions which underlay both the ostracism of Cimon in 461 and the almost continuous ascendancy of Pericles from that time until his death in the third summer of the Peloponnesian War. But a few further results of these same conditions are worth tracing before we return to consider their effects on the

³⁸ II 16. 1.

mind and work of Thucydides. Cimon, as the great leader of the Delian Confederacy and the champion of the crusade against Persia, had of course been identified with this expansion of Athenian sea power. Nevertheless, he always believed that in Greece itself there was room enough for both Athens and Sparta, and that the growth of his own state would not jeopardize the position of the old-fashioned land powers dominated by Sparta. But such swift and heady advances as that of Athens, eliciting as they do a vast access of energy and an almost unlimited belief in the future, are proverbially beyond the control of any man. When, therefore, Cimon was ostracized and Pericles emerged at the head of the now consciously liberated middle classes, it was almost inevitable that Athens should follow new and bolder paths. The next decade saw the widest extension of her power, an almost Napoleonic eruption, when Athenian forces not only fought in great numbers as far away as Egypt prosecuting the traditional war against Persia, but exerted their control over neighboring areas of Greece itself. Athens seized the once-proud trading cities of the Saronic Gulf, Aegina and Megara, acquired an outlet on the Corinthian Gulf by controlling Pegae, Naupactus, and Achaea, and even extended her power inland by overwhelming Boeotia. In the course of this struggle she repeatedly worsted Corinth, formerly the greatest and now the second naval state of Greece, while Sparta, for reasons to be considered in future chapters, sat idly by except for one fleeting victory. Herodotus,³⁹ commenting on the success of Athens

³⁹ V 78.

in the Persian wars, ascribed it to her democratic institutions, on the ground that under a democracy men know that they are fighting for themselves and not for a master. But the Athens of this period bears out even more strongly the truth of what he said. For in this first stage of her full-fledged democracy it was unquestionably the strong wine of self-respect and self-interest among the citizens that not only supplied the will to conquest but had previously supplied the economic means, and Thucydides, as will appear, appreciated this dynamic aspect of Athenian democracy to the full.

But such successes as those of the fifties, purchased by so continuous a drain on the city's man-power, could hardly last, and Athens' ensuing failures usher in the period with which we are most concerned in connection with the youth of Thucydides, namely, the nearly fifteen years of peace before the Peloponnesian War. These reverses occurred both abroad and in Greece. The expedition to Egypt, like the Sicilian expedition a third of a century later which crowns Thucydides' account of Athenian mistakes, failed with apparently great losses in 454, and when Cimon, who had now returned from his ostracism, died in 450 on a last expedition to Cyprus, Pericles made peace with Persia. Then in the autumn of 446, after the destruction of an Athenian force at Coronea in Boeotia in the previous year, the Spartans finally roused themselves to invade Attica. Euboea revolted at the same time. But whether the Spartans as a whole preferred not to risk an engagement or whether a small party opposed to the war was temporarily in control, in any case the king Pleistoanax accepted the

proposals for peace which Pericles made and held his forces at Eleusis. By this, the famous Thirty Years' Peace, ratified in the spring of 445, the two powers sanctioned each others' spheres of influence, Athens accepting Sparta's primary interest in the Greek mainland as far north as Boeotia, and Sparta recognizing Athens' leadership over the states of the Delian Confederacy. Of her recent conquests, Athens was to keep only Aegina, though it was no doubt a sore point to Corinth that she was not to give up her alliance with the Messenians of Naupactus on the Corinthian Gulf. For the future both sides agreed to arbitrate any disputes between themselves or between the members of their respective confederacies. It must have seemed to many Athenians that the struggles of the previous fourteen years had been proved largely waste and folly, and that Cimon's earlier policy of coöperation with Sparta had been abandoned by Pericles to their bitter cost. The collapse of Athens' conquests on the mainland in fact taught Pericles the great lesson of his career; and if it did not and could not check for long the restless vigor of the young democracy, still it dictated to what directions the energies of Athens should now be directed.

For the end of the war against Persia and the closing of the Greek mainland to Athenian expansion raised at last with inescapable clarity the question of Athens' relation to the Delian Confederacy. Ostensibly, the Persian danger was past and the confederate fleet, originally called into being to meet that danger, was no longer needed. Athens was therefore faced with a clear alternative: either she might suspend the payments from

the allied cities, reduce her fleet, and declare the happy era of employment and prosperity at an end, or else she might continue and even enhance the privileges of her citizens by using them openly to build and hold an empire. The conservatives, led by Cimon's kinsman, Thucydides the son of Melesias, apparently advocated something like the former of these two alternatives ⁴⁰ (the sources are particularly unclear for these crucial years). The landowning families and the farmers had little to gain and much to lose from Pericles' imperialistic policies which exalted the city against the country and the demos against the landowners, and it is significant of how low Pericles' influence had fallen after his recent reverses that in 444, seemingly for the first time, he failed of reelection to the generalship. Thucydides the son of Melesias took his place; a movement was begun to relax Athens' hold on the allied cities; ⁴¹ and a new era of international amity appeared to be opening when, under Athenian auspices, colonists from all Greek states were invited to join in the founding of Thurii in South Italy. Yet the change could not last. That the landowners should permanently control Athens meant that the people as a whole must unlearn the lessons of the thirty-five years since Salamis, must abandon the privileges of a metropolis, give up their democratic self-respect, and return to their inferior status in earlier generations. Such a change was economically impossi-

⁴⁰ Cf. H. T. Wade-Gery "Thucydides the Son of Melesias," *Journ. of Hellenic Stud.* 52 (1932), pp. 205-227.

⁴¹ The point of attack being Pericles' use of funds of the League for the building of the Parthenon. Cf. Plutarch, *Pericles* 12-15, and *Cambr. Anc. Hist.* V, 166-169.

ble and emotionally repellent. It is therefore not surprising that Pericles was promptly returned to office and that, in a trial of strength with him, Thucydides the son of Melesias was ostracized. When in 441 Samos attempted to secede from the Delian Confederacy, Athens by reducing the island left no doubt about the subject position of states in the League.

Pericles had therefore accepted the second of the two alternatives just mentioned. Athens was henceforth frankly an imperial city, even more dependent than before on absolute mastery of the Aegean. The steps taken for the orderly collection of the tribute, the measures designed to secure a steady supply of foodstuffs and materials from Thrace and South Russia, the increased planting of colonists throughout the Aegean, all show the consolidation of her imperial power. Similarly the employment of citizens on public monuments built from the funds of the Confederacy, the payment offered to magistrates and jurymen, the regulations prescribing that certain types of cases within the League be tried at Athens, and possibly even that commerce between allied states proceed via the Piraeus,⁴² prove how dependent was the democracy on the empire. Unquestionably the spirit of the city hardened in this decade and a half between the Peace of 445 and the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, when men now frankly accepted as subject the states that their fathers had freed from Persia in 480. But it must be remembered that, in renouncing conquest in mainland Greece, Pericles had turned almost conservative. Although his measures to-

⁴² Pseudo-Xenophon, *Constitution of Athens* II 12.

wards the empire were designed to support democracy in Athens, still the hopes which could be held forth before the common man were not in the thirties what they had been in the fifties. And when in addition he observed the strictest moderation towards the subject cities, where the middle and lower classes were unquestionably loyal to Athens, the proud claim that he made in the Funeral Oration seems almost justified: that Athens conferred more benefits than she received.⁴³ In the last years before the war, new leaders were already chafing at the restraints which he imposed. Like Cimon, he had set in motion forces that in the long run he could not control, and the *History* of Thucydides is in large part an analysis of how, after his death, fresh demands for conquest, raised then as before by the champions of extreme democracy, eventually proved Athens' ruin.

To return now to Thucydides, it was said earlier that, considering his birth and connections, it is to the highest degree surprising that he feels towards Pericles as he does. As a child he would have heard of Cimon's ostracism and, as a boy, of his death in Cyprus and of the reversal by Pericles of his policy towards Persia. Then, in his most impressionable years as a youth of twelve or fourteen, he would have watched the temporary triumph and swiftly following eclipse of Thucydides the son of Melesias. This man, called by Plutarch Cimon's *κηδεστῆς*, either brother-in-law or son-in-law,⁴⁴ was thus

⁴³ II 40. 4. A. M. Andreades, *A History of Greek Public Finance* (transl. by C. N. Brown, Cambridge, 1933), pp. 306-316, strongly supports on financial grounds the relative mildness of Periclean imperialism.

⁴⁴ *Pericles* 11. Aristotle, *Const. of Athens* 28. 3. The term might mean a more distant kinsman by marriage.

almost certainly a connection of Thucydides the historian, and it has been conjectured,⁴⁵ though we have no real evidence, that the historian was named for him. As was said earlier, the natural assumption for this period, indeed for any period, is that the members of so famous a family as the Philaidae shared the same outlook, and, if so, the historian must have been surrounded from earliest youth with an atmosphere of the most mordant, frustrated criticism of Pericles and of the full democracy that he represented. But, if that is the case, how is one to explain the historian's later admiration for Pericles? The answer must be that, as he came to manhood, he felt the futility of carrying into the present the issues of the past. It has already been observed that the decade of the 430's brought a certain hardening of mood in Athens, when men accepted the harsh fact of outright control over the empire as inevitable and natural. The hopeful era when the Aegean states were leagued in a common cause against Persia was over. So also, in the intense, progressive Athens of the present, the position of the old nobility must have seemed to some degree merely a relic of an easier past. Now nothing so marks Thucydides' work as this sense of living in a world where moral sensitiveness and inherited tradition were, so to speak, a luxury, and the very survival of states hung on the skilful use of power and power alone. The influence of the sophists on his thought is merely a symptom of this new mood of realism. For, as will be argued in the next chapter, the very rise of the sophists in these years before the war reflects primarily men's

⁴⁵ E. Cavaignac, *Rev. de philologie*, 3^me Série, 3 (1924), pp. 281-285.

feeling that the world had changed and that methods and standards must change with it. Taking these facts together, one therefore concludes that, partly through the now accepted imperialism of Athens herself and partly through the intellectual influences current there, Thucydides forsook as a youth the outmoded conservatism of his family to become an admirer of Pericles and a believer in the imperial democracy that he had created. And if such a change may indicate, as we suggested earlier, that Pericles towards the end of his life was no longer considered extreme, it nevertheless must still have represented a considerable act of will on Thucydides' part. At least, a decision of that kind, made against obstacles and after serious thought, would well explain the remarkable fact that, as early as the outbreak of the war, he saw clearly enough what was at stake to resolve on his *History*.

Some such account of his youth must then remain the most probable, as taking into consideration all the facts about him of which we are reasonably certain. But some of these facts, as has been said, — notably his kinship with the Philaidæ and his close connection with the clan in earlier life — do not rest on the only absolutely reliable testimony which we have about him, that which he himself gives. While, therefore, one must reckon first with some such account as that just given, still an essential understanding of his development must not be made to depend utterly on his connection with the Philaidæ. And in reality, as one considers his life as a whole, that single fact, while interesting and illuminating, is not of fundamental importance. What is important is that,

whether by an act of strong individual choice or not, he was before the war a convinced Periclean and democrat. All that has been said of the policies of Pericles and of the position to which those policies had brought Athens is therefore pertinent in regard to Thucydides under any considerations. He understood the dynamic growth of Athens and knew that the forces unleashed in the state by her democratic constitution were to a large degree responsible for that growth. He was convinced that the thriving metropolis that he knew could not renounce its imperial status and accept again the fettering control of the landed nobility. He therefore accepted Athens' domination of her formerly equal allies, repugnant as that was to Greek tradition and particularly to those who looked with horror on the swift shift of power that it implied, domestically and internationally. In short, in the years before 431, he grasped the nature of the struggle for power in Greece, describing it to himself in part by the realistic doctrines then being formulated by the sophists. Not only does he say virtually this in his first sentence, but how, without some such awareness, could he have grasped so clearly the steps preceding and attending the outbreak of war — particularly in the speeches and policies of Pericles — that he was able to recreate them many years later?

Only one point remains to suggest the historian's full development, a point which concerns the conduct of the war and which will be taken up in detail later. It has been remarked that, even during Pericles' last years, voices began to be raised in favor of a bolder expansion which would benefit the urban populace even more

greatly, and that the fatal schism in Athens during the first ten years of war developed on this issue. Now there is evidence that Thucydides in 424 was elected general, possibly at a by-election, by the moderates who still adhered to Pericles' express policy that Athens should attempt no territorial gains in the course of the war.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, it so happened that his term of office coincided with the one period, except for the year when the Sicilian expedition was sent out, when the radical proponents of expansion, now under the lead of Cleon, were at their strongest. In the summer of 425, after Athens' striking success at Pylos, the one good chance of peace with Sparta had been rejected through Cleon's influence; and when Thucydides was in Thrace a year later, all Athenian forces were being mustered for the offensive against Boeotia which was to repeat the conquest of thirty years earlier, the offensive which shattered in the disaster of Delium. Thucydides' account suggests that no reinforcements were dispatched to him or to the other Athenians who were meanwhile trying to hold the northern outposts of the empire against the inroads of Brasidas. When therefore he lost Amphipolis and was promptly exiled, it seems almost certain that he was made a scapegoat for Cleon's own losses at Delium. Thus if Thucydides was a convinced democrat in his youth, his personal misfortunes, as well as the natural tendencies of age, made him more conservative as he grew older. After the failure of the Sicilian expedition, the boldest flight of Athenian expansion, he became so

⁴⁶ A. B. West, "Pericles' Political Heirs," *Classical Philology* 19 (1924), p. 220, and "Athenian Generals of the Year 424-3 B.C.," *Amer. Journ. of*

hopeless of the democracy that he expressly approved its limitation under the so-called Constitution of the Five Thousand briefly set up in 411.⁴⁷ Indeed, as has been noted, his central explanation for Athens' defeat⁴⁸ is this same widening cleft between those who, like him, believed in the simple preservation of the empire and those others who, under the slogan of greater gains for the populace, would have repeated the expansion of the fifties. It is certain that, had he lived to complete his *History*, he would have sketched in darkening colors the spirit of disunion, bred on suffering, that forced the extreme democrats to an ever-increasing populism and made the conservatives into reactionaries.

Thus the historian whose mind was formed in the Athens of Pericles was so outstripped by events that, if he returned to his native city at the end of the war after his long exile, he could not have been at home there. More clearly than Pericles himself, he had passed from a democrat in his youth to a conservative in his age. If further, as a kinsman of Cimon and Thucydides the son of Melesias, he had early forsaken their policies for those of Pericles, then the gradual return to the conservatism of his age gives the more striking proof of the pressure of events during his lifetime. In any case, in reading the *History*, it is necessary to keep in mind the Athens both of his youth and of his age. For it was in the latter — or at least in contemplation of it — that he wrote his *History*, but in the former that his mind was

Philology 45 (1924), p. 152. West argues that he succeeded the general Eurymedon, who was deposed for accepting peace in Sicily (IV 65).

⁴⁷ VIII 97. 2.

⁴⁸ II 65.

shaped. Indeed, if the events of early life are important with any man, they were triply so with him, since he gained his sole experience of active politics at that time. Afterwards he was a spectator, doubtless analyzing events the more passionately because he could not share in them, and, if he completed only a part of his *History*, it is both fortunate and natural that that should have been the earlier part. For great as the whole *History* is, and without disrespect to the famous Sicilian narrative, it is the first four books, covering the period which he himself knew before his exile, that, in tone as well as in fact, seem to catch most intimately the echo of the past. Why that should have been is suggested by the experience of another expatriate, who, it will be recalled, placed the journey of the *Divine Comedy* in his youth in Florence and with an exiled man's intensity developed in it many of his earlier beliefs. In the same way, the very theme of his work recalled Thucydides to scenes and ideas which he had once known but the meaning of which, as time went on, must have come to him with an ever starker clarity. It may be that the intense vividness of his descriptions and the almost mathematical bareness to which he has distilled his ideas betray, more than anything else, an exile's brooding reconstruction.

Such then was the life of Thucydides, a life marked by a reversal of fortune as striking as that in any Greek tragedy. Little as is known of it, yet (if the interpretation just offered is in any sense correct) it is not only clear in its main outlines but highly significant for his future work. That he was born where and when he was means that from earliest youth he had acquired that

concern for problems of government which was to be the wellspring of his *History*. That he was apparently able to transcend the narrow vision of class and family, to admire Pericles and to grasp the significance of his democratic and imperialist policies, tells much not only of the objective mood in which he conceived his *History* but of the deep impression left on him by Athens' greatest statesman. That he owed his exile to the abandonment of the latter's defensive strategy — an abandonment which signified the rise of a new and militant populism — cannot be without significance either for his views on Athens' errors in strategy or for his emphasis on the purely political aspects of the war. Finally, the isolation of exile goes far to explain the rapt clarity of his imagination and the bareness, even the abstraction, with which he was able to grasp the vital forces at work in his time. The same fact must prepare one to believe, as will be argued later, that the speeches, especially of the early books, are in essence faithful to the period which they represent. For, however much Thucydides learned in exile, his mind can only have received its innermost stamp in the years of his active life.



CHAPTER II

INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

IN THE preceding chapter we saw something of the political events which shaped the life and, to a considerable degree, the thought of Thucydides. Yet obviously no man's thought, not even a historian's, is in the main directly molded by events themselves. Rather, events, by altering the conditions of life, demand new assumptions and create new habits of mind which in turn, as they become accepted, constitute what is called the intellectual atmosphere of an age. And since it is this atmosphere which influences men most constantly and most directly, we may well go on in this chapter to inquire what were the intellectual forces of Thucydides' day and how he was affected by them. For only by so doing shall we recapture something of the outlook and of the standards of judgment with which he entered upon his *History*. But there exists a still more important reason for making such an inquiry. Of the many problems presented by the *History*, undoubtedly the most important to ourselves is whether or not it offers, especially in the speeches, a reasonably authentic picture of men's minds in the period when, purportedly at least, the speeches were delivered — or (to put the matter in another way) whether the general cast of style

and thought in the speeches must be imagined as widespread in the early period of the war or, on the contrary, peculiar to Thucydides at the end of the war and thus fundamentally misleading for the earlier period. The value of the *History* will evidently be quite different depending on which of these alternatives is correct. In the one case it will contain for us an invaluable picture of Athens, and to some extent of Greece, at this crucial period of their existence. In the other it will present, to be sure, the impressions of an extremely acute contemporary observer, but will lack the former far more representative scope. Now in no part of his work are Thucydides' characteristic rationalism and his profound powers of political analysis more evident than in the speeches of the first four books covering the period before his exile; indeed, these books contain some two-thirds of the more than forty speeches in the *History*. An understanding of Athenian political thought and oratory in these years should therefore serve a double purpose. It should not only suggest something of the atmosphere in which the *History* was conceived but provide a means of judging how far we should see in these speeches the authentic voice of the later Periclean age.

It is obvious at the start that the sophistic movement is the great central fact with which we shall now be dealing. For the sophists as a class were not merely teachers of oratory; they led the way in that sweeping development by which prose supplanted verse as the vehicle of serious thought and acquired numberless new uses in the investigation of all individual and social problems. They, in short, fashioned both a vehicle and

a field of inquiry suited to the realistic temper of the later fifth century.

But in order to understand the exact character of their influence, it may be useful, as often, to go back. It is self-evident that all peoples, from the time when they begin to think consciously of their way of life, find some characteristic means of expressing the standards by which they live. When, as among the ancient Jews, belief in the guidance of a single God is strongly felt, then men express themselves theologically and point to God's acts as an explanation of the world and to his commandments as the basis of society. But the Greeks, on the other hand, who lacked any such overpowering belief in divine guidance, were inevitably driven to find other than theological explanations for their life and past, and it is significant that even in Homer the emphasis is not on the gods but on man. What happens in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* happens because the characters are what they are.

It is not easy to describe all the ways by which this essentially secular outlook on life found expression: it did so partly in myths, partly in gnomic rules and observations, and partly in broad generic pictures of human behavior. This last method is for the present purpose the most important. When Homer portrayed opposite types of women in Helen and Andromache, opposite types of men in Achilles and Hector, different ages and attitudes of mind in the keen Odysseus, the wise Nestor, the haughty Agamemnon, and the simple Ajax, he not only rested his poems on the lasting foundation of human experience; he also established for the

Greeks that tradition of generic portraiture and broad analysis which, perhaps more than anything else, lies at the root of the term "classic." But what is chiefly important here is to realize that this capacity for generalization, this insistence on the typical, remained characteristic of the Greek mind, because, being secular, it was compelled to draw its leading ideas almost entirely from observation. One must remember that the Greeks had no organized priesthood and no accepted theology, and that through the formative centuries of their development they further lacked any such sense of scientific law as in modern times supplies the basis of thought. The poets rather, as Aristophanes says,¹ were the teachers of Greece — a fact which shows once more how thoroughly the national mind was formed on broad truths of the sort that wisdom and observation can supply. For, barring theology or science as the foundation of thought, such insights into the nature of social and individual life necessarily remained the chief means whereby men saw themselves in relation to the world. There is no need here to follow the subject in detail or to see how, even during the more religious era that intervened between Homer and the writers of the fifth century, the poets remained true to their calling as interpreters of civic standards and human experience to the people. It is essential merely to recognize that, when after the middle of the fifth century the sophists to some degree took over the poets' earlier function in society, they could not and did not abandon the latter's essential attitude of mind. The Greeks still relied not on scientific or reli-

¹ *Frogs* 1054.

gious truths but on truths drawn from human observation, and, however novel the precise views of the sophists may have been, the character of those views was inevitably generic, inevitably more concerned with the law than the occurrence, the type than the individual.

The reasons for the appearance and success of the sophists are on the whole clear. The growth of democracy at Athens and the establishment of the empire, sketched in the last chapter, vastly altered the ways of life evolved in simpler ages. Shaken from their security and faced with the demands of a more complicated and competitive world, the aristocrats had to learn new arts of oratory and statecraft if they were to maintain their position, while the middle classes now had access to leadership if they could command the means to attain it. To describe adequately the change in outlook that resulted from these changed circumstances is of course extremely difficult. Something of it appears if one recall, for instance, the aristocratic ideal presented by Pindar. He praises, on the one hand, the physical strength and beauty of the victors and, on the other, their moral courage and self-restraint, qualities which he believes have descended from semi-divine ancestors and which he illustrates by the famous legends of the latter's feats. What is striking in this ideal is its extreme localism: in celebrating an Aeginetan victor Pindar points to the heroes of Aegina, in praising an Argive to the heroes of Argos. At the same time, the ideal rested on the assumption of innate personal virtue (*ἀρετή*), the development of which a man owed to himself, to his class, and to his ancestors — that is, to the

standards implicit in his local associations. But there is a diverting story in Herodotus which tells what happens to such standards in a time of growing intercommunication.² It is the story of how certain Greeks and Indians were talking about each other's burial customs and were each profoundly shocked: the Indians to learn that the Greeks burned their fathers, and the Greeks to discover that the Indians consumed theirs. Herodotus does not say that the standards of each were thereafter weakened, but that is inevitably the case, since the sanctity of standards is in their seeming universality. It is apparent then that, when the developments of the fifth century immensely broadened men's knowledge of each other and created in Athens at least a metropolis where, as Pericles says,³ the produce of all the world was familiar, the sanctity of local custom could hardly survive. In its place men sought a wider and more objective knowledge of mankind and were prepared to base their ideals of conduct upon these broader findings. The sophists, then, though they inherited the poets' function as classifiers and interpreters of experience, expounded a view of life far less local than theirs and standards of behavior derived from far more naturalistic sanctions. When Protagoras said that he did not know whether the gods existed or not,⁴ he clearly left no place for any standards other than those based on the observed workings of human nature.

It would be false to assume that the sophists were alone responsible for so profound a change of outlook

² III 38. 3-4.

³ II 38. 2.

⁴ Diels-Kranz, *Vorsokratiker* ⁵, II, fg. 4.

or that it became universal among their contemporaries. Their realism and objectivity would be unthinkable without the concept of fixed natural law first given currency by the Ionian physicists of the sixth century. One of the readiest and most fruitful ways of understanding the sophists is in fact to realize that they merely applied to human behavior those principles of mechanistic causation which the Ionian physicists had applied to the cosmos. Then again, Simonides, for example, anticipated their scepticism when he asked how far the standards of personal *ἀρετή*, in which Pindar saw the authority of the gods themselves, could be thought of as in any sense universal. Man, he said, is largely the creature of circumstance. "He is good if his luck is good and bad if it is bad."⁵ On the other hand, even during the period of the sophists' greatest influence, Sophocles resisted both their agnosticism and their tendency to regard human conduct as merely the result of natural forces. For, though more aware than Pindar of the dangerousness of life, he clung to the belief that the gods oversee the world and that human conduct ultimately has meaning in their eyes. But such amplifications and limitations do not alter the central fact before us: that the sophists as a class came into existence and won continuing success because they explained, or seemed to explain, the more complicated world evoked by Attic imperialism and Attic democracy.

What, then, were their teachings? In answering this question, it is necessary to remember that though the minor interests of individual sophists were extremely

⁵ Fig. 4, 10-11 (Diehl).

diverse (Protagoras, for instance, concerning himself among much else with grammar, mathematics, and dialectic, Hippias with mathematics and history, Antiphon with mathematics and physics, Prodicus with physics and mythology), they had one great purpose in common, the teaching of argument and oratory. For ability to speak, with all it implies of practical knowledge and power of analysis, was the chief instrument by which their pupils hoped to win success in active life. In Plato's *Protagoras*⁶ the great sophist is made to state the fact clearly when he says that he instructs his pupils in the intelligent administration of their own and the city's business, an art which Socrates calls the "political art." Evidently, then, the essential teachings of the sophists, as well as the underlying outlook which those teachings embodied, will appear most clearly in the methods of argumentation that they introduced. The fact is important; for it is often assumed that the few extant fragments of the early sophists constitute our main evidence on the movement, and, since these are in many cases harmless, it has even been argued that the sophists were simply rhetoricians exerting no profound effect on the thought of the day. When, however, one seeks their major influence in the methods of reasoning which became widespread in Athens after their arrival, not only are the implications of that reasoning quite clear, but even the date of its acceptance is relatively certain. For the sophistic arguments emerge suddenly in many works of the period, notably the plays of Euripides, the tract of the Old Oligarch, the long frag-

⁶ 319a.

ments of the sophist Antiphon, and the speeches of the like-named orator, even in Herodotus, Sophocles, and Aristophanes. These authors in turn permit us to reconstruct to some extent the intellectual currents of the Athens which Thucydides knew and thus to achieve what it was stated at the start we should ideally possess: namely, some insight into why the *History* was conceived when and as it was and some means of appraising its basic truthfulness of tone.⁷

The form evolved for his instruction by the first and greatest of the sophists, Protagoras, was the so-called antilogy, that is, opposite arguments, known as the *ἡττων* and the *κρείττων λόγος*, on either side of a question. By training his pupils in this way, Protagoras acquainted them with alternative lines of reasoning to be used as the case demanded, and that these arguments set forth fundamentally opposed attitudes towards a given subject and were thus of very wide application follows from the fact that they furnished a general preparation for speaking. It is significant that almost all the authors of the period, Thucydides not least, used pairs of arguments for exactly this purpose of expounding some basic contrast of attitudes. We know little about Protagoras' actual works except that many of them were political in character, but it is clear, at least, when his influence was felt at Athens. He was sufficiently known to be sent as lawgiver to the colony of Thurii founded in 443,⁸ and the earliest of Sophocles' extant plays, the

⁷ The subject is discussed in much greater detail in the first of the articles mentioned in the Foreword.

⁸ Diogenes Laertius, IX 50, on the authority of Heraclides Ponticus.

Ajax and *Antigone*, both almost certainly produced in the forties, contain pairs of arguments of the kind that Protagoras had introduced. These debates not only embody the essential questions of the plays, but in the *Ajax*, at least, the end of each speech in a given pair so markedly echoes that of the opposite speech as to create an almost statuesque contrast.⁹ The same is true of the *Medea* of 431,¹⁰ where, as one might expect, Euripides' argumentation is even more developed than that of Sophocles. Aeschylus, on the other hand, had made no use of such debates, even in the *Eumenides*, where the conflict of the old religion with the new forms the essence of the play. Evidently, then, Sophocles was affected as early as the forties by the new fashions of oratory — a fact further confirmed by the political content of his speeches. Menelaus in the *Ajax* and Creon in the *Antigone* expound the premises of oligarchy in words strikingly similar to those of Archidamus in the first book of Thucydides.¹¹ We have already seen that Protagoras was much concerned with government and his influence is usually found in the amusing debate in Herodotus in which Darius and certain other Persians discuss with truly superb inappropriateness the relative merits of monarchy, democracy, and oligarchy.¹² But in Greece, and particularly in Athens, as the characteristics and consequences of Attic democracy were becoming clear, such questions were not inappropriate. On the contrary, they must have been canvassed now as

⁹ Cf. ll. 479-480 and 523-524.

¹⁰ Cf. ll. 516-519 and 569-575.

¹¹ I 84. 3-4. *Ajax* 1081-1086, *Antigone* 666-676.

¹² III 80-82.

never before, and it is not too much to say that political questions, phrased by the method of searching antithesis introduced by Protagoras, must have formed the essence of Thucydides' early training. Nothing else can explain the profundity with which the habit of grasping ideas by pairs and in contrast was fixed in his mind. It showed itself later not only in the paired speeches of his *History*, but more pervasively in almost any given paragraph or sentence, being, as it were, the most instinctive, necessary clothing of his thought.

Of the lines of argument developed by the early sophists, the most striking perhaps is the argument from likelihood, *εἰκός*. Its most obvious use — and the one which, we are told, led to its perfection by the Sicilian Corax — was in the courtroom. A man accused, for instance, of murder could argue that it was unlikely that he, a small man, would attack a much larger man. The argument appears in this form in Antiphon's first Tetralogy and in a closely similar form in the *Hippolytus* and *Oedipus Rex*,¹³ the former produced in 428, the latter possibly a year earlier. But if this use of the argument was mild enough, that is not the case as one sees it in the tract of the Old Oligarch, usually dated at 424.¹⁴ The author is there discussing the character of democracy, and bases his whole argument on how it is

¹³ Respectively, ll. 994–1007 and 584–602.

¹⁴ Pseudo-Xenophon, *Constitution of Athens*. A somewhat later date has, to be sure, been urged by A. W. Gomme, *Athenian Studies* (*Harv. Stud. in Class. Philol.*, Suppl. Vol. I, 1940), pp. 211–245. The extremely numerous parallels between this work and the speeches of the *History*, particularly those of Pericles, are listed in the first of the articles mentioned in the Foreword, p. 25, n. 2. These parallels are one more proof that Thucydides attributes to his speakers ideas current in their times.

likely that a common man, given his nature and interest, will act politically. Without describing the argument in detail, it is enough to say that, from the premise that the masses are ill-educated and solely interested in their material advantage, the author deduces most of the actual practices of the Athenian state: distribution of offices by lot, prominence of litigation, harshness towards the subject allies, reliance on the lower classes as sailors rather than on the upper classes as hoplites. The extreme materialism of the point of view is obvious; in fact, though hostile to the masses, it closely resembles the materialist dialectic of our own times. For it assumes that a man's conduct is predictable from his interest, and that government is necessarily created for the material advantage of one class.

Of more immediate present concern, however, is the tremendous scope of the argument from likelihood when it is thus applied, not to the individual, but to the class. If one can say that it is natural for a large or small man to act in a certain way, it is equally possible to say that a democrat or oligarch and hence a democracy or oligarchy will tend to act in a certain way. In the eighth book of the *Republic*, Plato follows this line of reasoning when he derives the various forms of government from the various tendencies of human nature, and, since the method is already developed in the tract of the Old Oligarch, one concludes that it was evolved even earlier. At least, Aristotle's pupil Aristoxenus stated that much of the *Republic* was anticipated by Protagoras,¹⁵ and it seems not unreasonable to believe

¹⁵ Diels-Kranz, *Vorsokratiker* ⁵, II, fg. 5.

that the great sophist discussed the different forms of government in much this same way. But however that may be, the reasoning of the Old Oligarch clearly illustrates two points made earlier: that sophistic thought, inevitably based on observation, was concerned with the generic and the typical, and that in its essential materialism it left no place for ideals drawn from the social and religious sanctions of earlier times. It was based rather on the mechanistic view that behavior is simply the result of natural stresses. And since these stresses applied not to the individual but to the class and were therefore conceived as operating uniformly, it is easy to see what a formidable weapon of analysis was thus put in men's hands. As will be made clear in the next chapter, Thucydides unquestionably thought that he possessed an absolutely new and absolutely reliable means of appraising the forces at work in his own day. He was convinced that these forces would operate similarly in similar eras of the future and for that reason predicted undying usefulness for his book. There can be little doubt that he came to these opinions largely because the idea had already become widespread that a given class of people will react uniformly to given conditions and hence that their behavior is subject to analysis and even to prediction. A strong reason why he undertook his work as a young man at the start of the war must have been that he felt the enormous pertinence of such reasoning to the writing of history.

Example after example could be given to show how Thucydides follows the pattern of thought underlying the argument from likelihood, but one or two instances

will perhaps suffice. In the first chapters of the work comprising the so-called *Archaeology*, he justifies his early prescience of the magnitude of the war by contrasting contemporary economic conditions with those of Greece at the time of the Trojan War. In so doing, he reasons that, since in backward regions in his own day certain practices still obtained — for instance, piracy and the carrying of arms — which Homer described as prevalent in the heroic world, then the general cast of heroic life must have resembled that in these contemporary backward regions.¹⁶ Given social traits evidently postulated to him a given type of society and government. The one followed naturally from the other. Again, his famous analysis of the effects of revolution on the public mind¹⁷ draws its unrivalled power from his habit of seeing the typical consequences of a given condition. Calamities then took place, he says, “which occur and always will occur while human nature remains the same,” and he goes on to enumerate the sharp changes in behavior and outlook which, so he thought, inevitably attend the dislocations of war.

These passages perhaps sufficiently illustrate how thoroughly Thucydides had learned to reason along the same materialistic and observational lines which were noted in the tract of the Old Oligarch, but one other use of the argument from likelihood is worth mentioning because of its extreme importance in the *History*. Aristotle makes a distinction between courtroom speaking, which looks to the past, and parliamentary speaking,

¹⁶ I 5-6.

¹⁷ III 82-88.

which is concerned with the future.¹⁸ Just as the lawyer Antiphon argues how a certain type of man would probably have acted, so the various speakers in the *History* are constantly predicting the probable outcome of policies and the future course of events. Now to Thucydides the supreme requisite of a politician is his *πρόγνωσις* — his ability to foresee — and the *History* itself is, in essence, a manual for future statesmen, instructing them in the outcome of conditions destined to be repeated. Inevitably, therefore, he attributes to his speakers these same methods of deducing the typical results of given circumstances. But though no genuine political speech has come down to us from the early — indeed (except for a brief fragment of Thrasymachus) from any — period of the war, and we thus cannot prove how accurately Thucydides catches the oratory of the time, there is no good reason to doubt his essential truthfulness. The period which saw, in Antiphon and in the speeches of tragedy, such broad arguments directed to past events and, in the tract of the Old Oligarch, such sweeping deductions regarding contemporary conditions could hardly have produced speeches on policy of quite a different cast. As was argued earlier, one of the greatest traits of the Greek mind — a trait never better exemplified than in the fifth century — was its concern for the generic, and when Thucydides' speeches are supremely marked by this trait, one should not explain the fact merely by his genius but by his actual experience, doubtless somewhat idealized in retrospect, of the Attic oratory of his youth.

¹⁸ *Rhetoric* I 3. 4, 1358b 14.

Another line of sophistic argument which, though different from the preceding, often accompanies it, is that from expedience — τὸ συμφέρον. The statement, "men tend to do what profits them," illustrates how easily the two arguments coalesce, and in fact any such general assertion necessarily implies a judgment of how men as a class are likely to act. In itself, however, the concept that men are primarily moved by their advantage forms the obvious antithesis to the ideals of justice and honor, τὸ δίκαιον and τὸ καλόν, which had been the wellspring of Greek literature since Homer's time, and is used to refute these. Thus, in the *Medea*,¹⁹ when the heroine has stated her rightful claims on her husband Jason, he replies harshly that, the world being what it is, he is acting for her and their children's best interests by finding a richer wife. There are similar arguments in the *Oedipus* and *Hippolytus*.²⁰ Again, as we have seen, the tract of the Old Oligarch is based on the assumption that the Athenian demos acts wholly and simply for its own interest. Now it could be said that this is nothing more than a very ancient and permanent human attitude exemplified, for instance, in the speech of Odysseus in the ninth *Iliad* or, even more, by that of Thersites in the second. But one must remember that we are dealing here with lines of argument formally taught and consciously adopted in the late Periclean age as the basis of successful pleading. The careful symmetry of the debate in the *Medea* has already been noted. No better example could be found of the fashion of reasoning on

¹⁹ Lines 545-567.

²⁰ Respectively, ll. 594-595 and 462-465.

opposite lines which Protagoras had introduced and which profoundly affected Thucydides. But if so, then the argument from advantage is more than a mere trick of pleading; it offers a searching commentary on the temper of the day. For that it was perfected for practical use means that speakers expected to make, and audiences to hear, realistic estimates of human motives and public policy. It was noted in the last chapter that, when Pericles in the fifteen years before the war consciously substituted outright control of the Delian Confederacy for the dangers and strains of a common war against Persia, a new hardening of mood is to be felt in Athens, as if men's estimate of human nature, their own included, was subtly darkening. The change is to be felt, for instance, in the opening scene of the *Medea* where the old servant, on being told by the shocked chorus that Jason is preparing to desert Medea, replies:

Have you just realized this,
That each man loves himself beyond all others? ²¹

It is equally to be felt in the fragments of the sophist Antiphon, to be discussed presently, and in the tract of the Old Oligarch. More than anything else, this new insistence on the concept of advantage, τὸ συμφέρον, epitomizes the curious disillusionment which now, as at other times in history, darkened men's outlook in the period of their greatest material achievement.

It is not therefore surprising that the argument and the underlying attitude which it implies appear prominently in the *History*. As contrasted with Herodotus,

²¹ Lines 85-86.

Thucydides devotes his whole work to analyzing the actual, and therefore often the material, aspects of the war, and Sophocles' remark about Euripides could as well have been made by the older about the younger historian, "I make men as they should be, he makes them as they are."²² More specifically, the first debate in the *History*,²³ that between the Corcyreans and Corinthians, turns on the same conflict between expedience and justice that has been noted in the *Medea*. The question at issue is whether Athens should ally herself with Corcyra, a colony of Corinth then at odds with the mother city. The Corcyreans point to the great advantage that their navy would be to Athens in the event of war, while the Corinthians have nothing to offer except evidences of past decency, alike towards Athens and towards Corcyra. It is significant of Thucydides' attitude towards events that the arguments of the Corcyreans prevail, and not less significant of his method that the issue is put exactly in this way. The close parallel presented by the debate in the *Medea* offers striking proof that these were the methods of argument in use at the time in Athens, and, though that fact might be taken to prove merely that Thucydides was influenced as a writer by the tragedians, surely it proves more than that. For the whole development of Attic tragedy was towards a greater naturalism, and Euripides in 431 would hardly have made his characters speak in this way unless the sophistic arguments were generally known and practised. In sum, though other such parallels could be adduced, this one is

²² *Poetics* 25, 1460b 32.

²³ I 32-43.

perhaps sufficient to indicate both the mood of conscious realism which was prevalent in Athens during Thucydides' earlier years and the faithfulness with which he portrayed that mood in the *History*. He was the child of an age that had seen the ideal vision of a great movement of liberation fade into the consciousness of mere struggle for power — which is to say that he lived in an age of growing imperialism when man had become jealously aware of their local advantages. This fact had called forth the attitudes of mind phrased by the sophists, and this fact both explains and validates the essential picture of the times which emerges from the speeches of the *History*.

Finally, there is an argument of transcendent importance for the thought of the period, that from *φύσις*, human nature. Though obviously related to the concept of likelihood (with which it is grouped by later writers on rhetoric), it nevertheless seems to stand by itself in the writings of this era as a fresh and profoundly cogent idea. In the *Medea*,²⁴ after the heroine has recalled to Jason what she has done for him, he replies that these acts signify no merit on her part and demand no requital on his, since she was acting under the sway of passion. The poet evidently conceives of human nature as so subject to overmastering impulses as to be almost powerless before them, as is made doubly clear later in the play²⁵ when Medea cries out that she knows the evil that she contemplates towards her children but cannot keep from it. Similarly in the *Hippolytus*,²⁶ when Phae-

²⁴ Lines 526–531.

²⁵ Lines 1078–1080.

²⁶ Lines 437–476.

dra has said that she will die before revealing her passion, the Nurse answers that there is no call for shame, since passion is a natural instinct governing human beings as it does all creatures. One must therefore accept it, she goes on, making what outward adjustments are necessary to the purely artificial standards of society.

These passages, which are quite central to these peculiarly bitter, because hopeless, plays, might have been thought to express merely the despairing insight of one tragedian, were it not for the discovery some years ago of fragments of the *Ἀλήθεια*, *Truth*, of the sophist Antiphon²⁷ which express views almost identical with those of the Nurse in the *Hippolytus* and are thus evidently of about the same period. Broadly speaking, Antiphon is interested in showing that the laws of nature govern human behavior far more forcibly than the shallow and inconsistent laws of society, his argument being that if you break the former you are instantaneously punished by being made less able to survive, whereas if you break the latter you may or may not come to harm. The fragments are doubly interesting because they reveal an early stage in the famous dispute on the relative authority of nature and convention, which finds its ultimate expression in the *Gorgias* and *Republic* of Plato. By the end of the century, men argued, as Callicles does in the *Gorgias*, that the strong individual is justified by nature in pursuing his advantage unchecked. But that extreme view probably first arose in reactionary circles at the time of the democracy's worst excesses, and An-

²⁷ Diels-Kranz, *Vorsokratiker*⁵, II, fg. 44, pp. 346-355.

tiphon knows nothing of it.²⁸ He only asserts the existence of the natural laws. His tone is in general that of a scientist (in fact, the lost first book of the *Ἀλήθεια* dealt with the mathematical and physical constitution of the world), and he may therefore exemplify for ourselves the class of teachers who during Thucydides' early manhood were expounding in Athens a new and objective concept of society based on their new understanding of man's place in nature.

That such was a common function of sophists at the time appears from Aristophanes' portrait of Socrates in the *Clouds*, a portrait not so much of the individual as of a typical sophist concerned partly with public speaking, partly with novel views on society, and partly with physical investigation. Antiphon well illustrates the kind of teacher that Aristophanes had in mind. It is further evidence on how widespread the interest in natural law then was that the famous debate in the *Clouds*²⁹ between the Old and the New Education turns on this same question of social restraint as opposed to natural impulse which we have already seen in Euripides and Antiphon. By the outbreak of the war many philosophers, notably Anaxagoras, had long been in Athens, and, though their direct teachings on the physical make-up of the universe could hardly have reached a wide circle, it is not surprising that men were generally receptive to similar, if more popular, views. The sophists, who were themselves versed in the higher philosophy of the time, merely applied its inherent materialism to the

²⁸ W. W. Jaeger, *Paideia* (Eng. trans. by G. Highet, New York, 1939), pp. 321-326.

²⁹ Lines 889-1104.

problems of society, and, if the effect of the new doctrines of natural law was to undermine men's faith in earlier standards, that was not so much the fault of the sophists as of the times. For the immense growth of Athens inevitably produced more materialistic and universal standards, and the sophists simply phrased what the Athenians as a people had come to feel by experience.

How deeply Thucydides was affected by this new sense of man as the creature of natural forces seems hardly necessary to say, particularly after what has been said already about the argument from likelihood. The idea that human life, like the life of the cosmos, follows observable laws is clearly only another and stronger way of stating what men as a class are likely to do, and therefore of establishing that uniformity and even predictability of human conduct which, as we saw, provides the very foundation of the *History*. But, as is evident from the passages referred to in the last paragraph, the doctrine of *φύσις* has a somewhat special connotation: that of exposing the real, as opposed to the artificial, springs of human action. Euripides and Antiphon make it quite clear that, even during Thucydides' earlier years in Athens, men were casting away the reasons formerly given for behavior and substituting what seemed truer, if less moral, explanations. Thucydides' own outlook is much affected by that attitude, and herein one sees again how his early acquaintance with politics in this period of frank imperialism coalesced, as it were, with the harsher theories then in the air. The purpose of the *History* will be considered in the next chapter, but it is evidently

directed in some measure to future politicians, men whose business it is to see in this way the real, rather than the apparent, reasons for things, and it is impossible that this purpose was absent from Thucydides' mind when he conceived his work.

His speakers also appeal to the authority of the laws of nature. Thus in the first book the Athenian ambassadors at Sparta justify the empire in the following words: "It follows that it is nothing surprising or unusual if, moved by three of the strongest motives — fear, honor, and interest — we originally accepted and later refused to give up the empire that was offered us. We did not set the example; it has always been the law that the weaker should be subject to the stronger."³⁰ Pericles, too, in his third speech, describes the empire as a tyranny and justifies it by the eternal necessity of ruling or being ruled.³¹ The idea appears again in the famous debate in the third book between Cleon and Diiodotus on the punishment proper for the revolting Mytileneans. Cleon urges summary execution on the ground that rebellion constituted an accepted offense and that death was therefore justified by Greek precedent. Diiodotus, in answering him, relies chiefly on the argument from expedience, urging that Athens should do nothing that is not in her own best interests, but he also states that it is impossible to talk of criminal disobedience in the present connection, since in recorded history human beings have never been checked by any law from doing what they really wished to do. "Either, then, some fear stronger than death must be found or it must be admitted

³⁰ I 76. 2.

³¹ II 63.

that this restraint is useless, and that as long as poverty forces men to courage, or power gives them the ambitions natural to the confident and proud, and the other conditions of life all remain subject to some dominating passion, even so long will men be driven into danger.”³²

The contrast in positions between Cleon and Diodotus, it will be observed, is exactly the same as that between Phaedra and the Nurse in the *Hippolytus*, produced the year before this debate was held. Like Phaedra, Cleon urges what is considered just by Greek practice, and, like the Nurse, Diodotus counters by the expedient, reinforcing his views, as she does hers, by reference to the amoral promptings of natural law. Now, as was said earlier, we have no actual speeches of the period which will permit us to judge how faithful the speeches in the *History* are. Moreover, as we have just seen, Thucydides himself was a strong rationalist with his own views about history and his own purposes for his work, and it may well be that this bias colored his work, making the speeches in particular more searching and profound than the originals would have been. Nevertheless, this close similarity between the debate in the *Hippolytus* and the Mytilenean speeches, like the similar parallel between the *Medea* and the Corcyrean debate, leaves no room for doubt that the ideas which Thucydides attributes to his speakers were in fact the fresh and moving ideas of the period. His own mind was formed on these ideas and he inevitably pondered them throughout his exile during the long years before he wrote his *History*. But the popularity of the sophists is

³² III 45. 4.

sufficient proof that many others in Athens besides himself thought in these new ways, and the fundamental reason for believing in the truthfulness of the speeches is that the oratory and thought of these years before his exile was all that he knew from his own experience, and he inevitably kept it before him, perhaps with all the greater clarity, throughout the rest of his life.

There is perhaps no need to speak further of the argumentation introduced by the sophists or to give more examples of how Thucydides reflects it. His style will be considered in a later chapter, and the question how far it too derives from the style common in his youth will be discussed then. But it may be useful to bring together the points hitherto made about the sophistic movement in order to achieve a more general picture of it, not merely as an historical force but, more broadly, as embodying certain long-standing attitudes of the Greek mind.

At the start of the chapter, it was pointed out that the Greeks, because of the secular nature of their thought, relied more than other peoples on observation, and that since, further, this observation was long dissociated from purely scientific inquiry, it expressed itself in delineations of human types, in myths that portrayed basic relationships, and in gnomic statements of social and moral truths. On the other hand, the Ionian physicists and, even more, the medical writers of the fifth century were very largely moved by the spirit of detailed, specific inquiry familiar in modern times. And since Thucydides, as we have seen, was evidently much concerned with the generic and the typical but at the same time was at

equal pains to trace specific events with utmost accuracy, it is of interest to see how these two opposite tendencies — the one towards the typical, the other towards the specific — revealed themselves in the thought of his time. For this larger aspect of his inheritance is clearly of final importance for his work.

To begin with what has been called the tendency to the typical, it was observed in Homer's great delineations of the kinds and conditions of men. Certainly it is not less apparent in Pindar's descriptions of the heroes as prototypes of the different virtues, or in Aeschylus' half-symbolic figures, his Prometheus and Xerxes, his Furies and Apollo. Such characters as these, however, are not purely symbolic. The Greeks' sense of reality permitted them to simplify and generalize, but never to desert experience for abstraction. The marvel of Greek literature resides not a little in this fact, that its characters somehow possess a clear generic significance without, at the same time, losing reality as creatures of flesh and blood. And if one seek to explain this achievement, one inevitably returns to the fact that it was the poets of Greece, not priests or scientists, who chiefly explained and clarified experience to the people. Hence it can be said of Greek thought that it derived on the one hand from observation, not from dogma, but on the other hand from the observation of experience, not from scientific observation. That this process, moreover, involved generalization must be evident from the fact that, if a people is to possess a body of thought at all, that thought must rest on general ideas and broadly applicable truths. Thus it is no accident that in the wide field of legend

of which the poets wrote, they discovered not primarily individuals but persons of representative lives and lasting attitudes. As was suggested earlier, that is part of the meaning of the word classic. It is humane observation broadened and tested until it achieves almost — though it never fully can — the objective validity possessed in another domain by scientific thought.

If one examine the sophistic movement in the light of this tradition, it is evident that the arguments from the likely, the expedient, and the law of nature possess in a slightly different sense this same generic quality. That is equally true of the opposite arguments from the noble and just, though these illustrate less well the new naturalism of sophistic thought. What therefore must be emphasized at the risk of repetition is that neither the sophists nor their pupils can be expected to have thought in those specific and concrete lines familiar to the modern mind. We have seen the Old Oligarch expounding the underlying tendencies of Athenian democracy and, only in the light of these, touching upon the actual institutions and policies of Athens. Similarly, the sophist Antiphon sets forth the doctrine of natural law with only occasional instances of its specific application, and in the debates of the *Medea* and *Hippolytus* the immediate, personal conflict rises to a truly representative conflict of opposing attitudes. Other examples would merely reinforce the same conclusion that the sophists did not diminish, but probably even increased, the long-standing Greek concern for the typical. People still demanded from these new interpreters of life, as from the poets, those broad statements of men's rela-

tionship to each other and to the outside world which were the main avenues of truth to the humanistic Greek mind.

But if this is the case, then one or two conclusions of some importance for the *History* follow. The first concerns the rhetoric on which Thucydides and his contemporaries were educated. We are accustomed to think of rhetoric as decoration, something which glozes and adorns an unrelated subject. Even Aristotle a century later calls it a derivative art which takes its method from the science of logic and its substance from the findings of ethics and politics.³³ But it is clear from what has been said that in the fifth century these latter subjects could have had no existence as apart from the art of speaking. To be sure, as was said earlier, the sophists pursued subsidiary lines of investigation. Nevertheless because, like the poets, these men existed to set forth general ideas actively by the spoken word, all their minor studies were only parts or instruments of rhetoric. That is doubly clear because, as was said, the reason why the sophists arose was that they might teach men to face the altered conditions of the latter half of the fifth century, and their views on ethics and government which gave rise to the later study of these subjects were integral parts of that teaching and designed for active use. Evidently, then, the pupils of the sophists acquired from them more than the mere art of speaking, more than rhetoric in the modern sense. In learning to speak, they learned to analyze the nature of government and to appraise the older ethical standards, precisely because these subjects were

³³ *Rhetoric* I 2. 7, 1356a 25.

at the very heart of what they had come to learn. This wide concept of rhetoric as embracing and making effective all other humane studies was reaffirmed by Isocrates, Cicero, and Quintilian, and remained perhaps the greatest single force in ancient education. But even this vast legacy of the sophists is of less importance here than to realize that, if what has been said of the generalizing character of Greek thought is true, one cannot think of the oratory of the later fifth century as in any sense narrow in its aims. When in the *History* Pericles analyzes the nature of democracy or the Athenian ambassadors at Sparta state the principles of imperial power, one can only believe that these very searching speeches do in fact reflect the contemporary manner of speaking. Thucydides' speeches, it is true, are compressed and therefore more abstract than actual speeches would have been, but in their absorption with the general principles of ethics and politics they essentially reflect a period in which these new studies were a living part of rhetoric.

It might be replied that the mass of the people could not have followed speeches of so general a character, but to make such an objection is to misunderstand the mind of the fifth century, indeed of any great period. The plays of Shakespeare and the sermons of early Protestantism give proof enough of the capacity assumed in an ordinary audience or congregation. It could be argued that any era which offers the ordinary man vast horizons of opportunity demands and receives from him a fresh comprehension proportionate to his fresh self-respect. Attic tragedy, even the philosophic

and political subjects treated by Aristophanes, cannot be explained on any other assumption. If, therefore, one keep in mind the character both of Greek thought and of the age, the breadth of Thucydides' speeches becomes not only explicable but expected. They are great partly because a keen observer trained himself to distil the inner meaning from the events of his age. But they are great also because they reflect the first ambitious flowering of rhetoric in a great period.

The other conclusion has been in part expressed already. It concerns the new abstraction of sophistic thought as compared with that of the past. We have seen that Homer chiefly portrayed the kinds and conditions of human beings. He was not, it is true, unfamiliar with more general ideas, as the fables of the Prayers and of the Jars of Zeus well show.³⁴ Hesiod had a greater interest in such ideas, and in later ages this interest increased still further. Solon's *Eunoμία*, Tyrtaeus' portrait of the true Spartan, and many passages of Pindar and Aeschylus are concerned not so much with man himself as with his ethical standards and political relationships. Nevertheless, it is in the sophistic age that one first encounters a truly widespread absorption with ideas rather than persons. The Old Oligarch has no interest in human beings as such, but only in that part of them that shows itself in government; he is concerned, in sum, with the idea of democracy. Similarly, both the sophist Antiphon and Euripides treat the tendencies of the human mind with a new breadth of conception. Even the debates of the *Ajax* and the *Antigone*, previously

³⁴ *Iliad* IX 502-512; XXIV 527-533.

cited as showing the influence of Protagoras, reveal something of this same spirit. Though Sophocles' rounded vision, it need hardly be said, saw much more than a conflict of ideas in the tragic clash of personalities, it is nevertheless true that the *Antigone* treats a great social problem with a bareness and concentration quite unknown to earlier verse. To be sure, Aeschylus in his *Prometheus* and *Eumenides* had typified great social problems. But the writers of this age see such questions more theoretically, abandoning Aeschylus' lofty symbolism for more analytical methods. Now we have seen that such a capacity for theory strongly marks both the speeches of the *History* and Thucydides' direct exposition. Pericles' analysis of democracy in the Funeral Oration and the author's own train of reasoning in the Archaeology provide examples of what is meant, though great numbers of other passages would serve as well. But it follows from what has just been said that the rhetoric introduced by the sophists must not only have embraced wider fields of study, such as ethics and politics, but have done so with a more conscious emphasis on theory. The contemporary world was so complex that any other method would have been impossible. The older symbolism drawn from mythology no longer served, and therein lies much of the reason why prose now rapidly replaced verse as the main vehicle of thought. We return therefore to the conclusions reached earlier regarding the origins of Thucydides' own thought and the basic veracity of his speeches. However individually prone to abstraction Thucydides may have been or may have come to be through his long exile, such a capacity for abstraction is nevertheless the very hall-

mark of the period and particularly of that rhetoric in which the changed conditions of the period find their fullest expression.

This much will perhaps suffice to suggest what was called earlier the tendency to the typical in Greek thought and in that of Thucydides. It has been emphasized to such an extent not merely because of its importance for any judgment of his work but because it has been too often neglected. Thucydides' contrary feeling for the specific, manifested in his rigid and detailed standards of accuracy, is without doubt imposing. But, since this latter aspect of his thought is far more comprehensible to the modern mind, it has too often been represented as the whole of this thought, as if Thucydides were chiefly remarkable for being, so to speak, a modern historian born before his time. But to think of the *History* as notable merely for its accuracy is to miss its essence, to forget that its author was a Greek, and to neglect that profoundest of Greek abilities, apparent alike in their literature and in their art, the ability to convey the generic without falsifying the unique. No other trait of the Greek mind more clearly reveals the humanistic character of their civilization, and none is more to be admired by an age that relies more heavily on the postulates of science than on those of social insight and tested experience. Thucydides himself expressly valued his work not for its accuracy (important as he thought accuracy to be) but for its exposition of recurrent social forces,³⁵ and his judgment sets the order in which we too should appraise it.

But to say a few words, finally, of what was called

³⁵ I 22. 4.

the tendency to the specific, it is revealed in his extreme care in verifying the exact nature of events, in the precision of his chronology, and in the detailed information which he gives about a multitude of matters bearing on the progress of the war. More will be said on these points in the next chapter, but it may be useful now to consider whether these rigorous standards, differing as they do from those of Herodotus, were peculiar to himself or whether they too reflect currents of contemporary thought. Not many years ago an able and interesting book was written to show that Thucydides formulated his ideas of historical proof under the influence of the Hippocratic school of medicine.³⁶ The reasons for so thinking are: first, that he applies to the causes of the war the same word *πρόφασις* by which the medical writers commonly denote the cause or, more literally, the "explanation" of disease; and second, that by his own words the *History* as a whole is to fulfil the same prognostic function — namely, the function of enabling men to recognize recurrent phenomena — that underlies many medical writings of the period and, particularly, his own account of the plague. Others, he says in the latter passage, may debate the causes of the plague, but, "as for myself, I shall simply describe its progress, setting down the symptoms that one should look for in order to be able to recognize it if it should recur."³⁷ The idea that by describing events exactly and refraining from unverifiable theories regarding their origins you can establish a pattern which will be valid for the future

³⁶ C. N. Cochrane, *Thucydides and the Science of History*, Oxford, 1929.

³⁷ II 48, 3.

is an idea which has a close bearing on the *History*.

To be sure, Thucydides is concerned with the causes of the war, as the medical writers likewise treat the immediate origins of disease. What he rejects appears to be purely philosophic or religious speculation in regard to causes, and herein is perhaps his closest tie with the best medical thought of the time. For without going into that interesting subject here, it can be said that the identifying mark of a body of writings from the late fifth century usually called Hippocratic — notably the *Prognostic*, *Regimen in Acute Diseases*, and *Epidemics* I and III — is that they substitute alike for religious dogma and philosophic theory an exclusive regard for the symptoms and circumstances of disease. The theory on which these writings were based is that all disease is marked by periods of crisis and that painstaking clinical study will therefore enable the physician to appraise the probable severity of these periods, his function being not to prevent them (which would be impossible) or generally to expect a successful issue but simply to assist as he can the patient's powers of resistance. It is natural that the adherents of the school should have taken stock also of local and atmospheric conditions. This practice, particularly marked in the *Epidemics*, as in an earlier work possibly by the same hand, the famous *Airs, Waters and Places*, has given rise to the name "meteorologische Medezin" as a designation for the whole school,³⁸ and, like the practice of noting periods of crisis, is strongly observable in Thucydides' description of the

³⁸ K. Deichgräber, "Die Epidemien und das Corpus Hippocraticum," *Abhandl. d. Berl. Akad.*, Phil.-Hist. kl., 1933, no. 3.

plague. If the scientific mind is one which is strictly governed in its conclusions by the data of observation, then the mind revealed in this group of writings has every claim to be called scientific, and the author's cool impersonal tone is in keeping with his method. From Thucydides' description of the plague, there can be no doubt that he was thoroughly acquainted with this school of thought, and the kinship of tone between the *History* and the tracts of the Hippocratic group, particularly the *Epidemics*, has struck more than one observer. It is difficult therefore to escape the conclusion that he was to some extent influenced by medical theory, both in his standards of accuracy and in the prognostic intention of his work. It even seems possible that his clear emphasis on the crucial stages of the war, which he normally marks by speeches, reflects some feeling on his part that the social, like the individual, organism is subject to periods of crisis.

Nevertheless, it would be false to overstress this influence. The arguments of the sophists, as we saw, assume a stable world in which men respond uniformly to given circumstances, and this mechanistic reasoning was valued because it permitted men, they thought, to understand and thus in part to foretell human behavior. The statesman, quite as much as the physician, needed this power of prediction, and it is of statesmanship that Thucydides wrote. It seems rather that, in the latter half of the fifth century, similar tendencies appeared at the same time in different fields of investigation and that the ideas proper to one subject proved fruitful in another, just as in recent times the concept of relativism

has come to have a wide application outside of Einsteinian physics. The fact can be observed not only as regards the ideal of prognosis but also in respect to Thucydides' standards of accuracy, which exemplify what was called earlier the tendency to the specific in his thought. He certainly did not share this tendency with the medical writers alone. On the contrary, notices exist of many contemporary writings of a specialized nature: for instance, Sophocles on the Chorus (that is, probably on tragedy as a whole), Ictinus on the Parthenon, Polyclitus on symmetry, Meton on the calendar, Hippodamus on city-planning. Developments in all the practical arts were also taking place very rapidly throughout the period, and those advances necessarily imply a more exact understanding of a given subject and more thorough standards of accuracy. Indeed, one class of contemporary prose, the so-called *ὑπόμνημα*, definitely bore the character of a scientific tract, the medical writings being one subdivision of the larger category. It is impossible to think of the great material progress of the fifth century without realizing the new importance that came to be attached to technique. But the same fact is hardly less apparent in the realms of thought and literature. In such characters as his Pheres or his Electra, Euripides notably departed from precedent to portray human beings as he knew them. He, moreover, makes much the same criticisms of Aeschylus' unrealistic art³⁹ as Thucydides makes of that of his own predecessors; both reflect the more exacting spirit of the age. Even Socrates' manner of thought, directed

³⁹ *Suppliants* 846-857, *Electra* 524-544, *Phoenissae* 751-752.

though it was towards ideal aims, tells much of the same methods. He was strikingly unwilling to accept any previous hypotheses on the nature of man but constantly examined particular instances of behavior in the hope that he might inductively reach some new and valid conclusions. Clearly he had this in common with the medical writers and with Thucydides, that he believed general conclusions possible only through a detailed study of particulars.

These instances of the current trend towards careful observation do not, it is true, make clear exactly how far Thucydides was influenced in his standards of accuracy by the medical writers. But they at least show that that influence, whatever it may have been, was only part of a more general contemporary influence — what has been called the tendency to the specific, existing side by side with the more peculiarly Greek tendency to the typical. But from what has been said of this double aspect of Thucydides' inheritance, one is perhaps justified in making a final judgment of him: namely, that he, more than any of his contemporaries, succeeded in alloying standards of detailed accuracy with a deep and compelling sense of the generic. Socrates ironically stated that he could reach no general conclusions; the best medical thought, as was seen, was by its own theories confined to the specific; even Euripides, in spite of his striking realism and his equally great ability to portray the inward and fundamental conflicts between his characters, rarely so blended the one capacity with the other as to leave a clear and unified interpretation of life. On the other hand, such sophistic theorists as the Old Oli-

garch and, even more, the sophist Antiphon were so absorbed with general ideas as to neglect or to distort the specific instances on which those ideas were based. Only Thucydides is able to mount consistently and with even flight from events in themselves to their larger bearing. It is true that he rarely gives his own judgment of events, but commonly reserves such judgments for the speeches. Nevertheless, the narrative and speeches taken together do effect a union, as rare as it is imposing, between detailed fact and broad deduction. If the previous argument has any merit, then it will follow that he could not have risen to such heights of achievement merely because he was a gifted man or because he had had military and political experience or because during his exile he had leisure to ponder on all that he had seen, but because, as an Athenian of the fifth century, he was reared in a long tradition of broad generic insight, now fortified by a new feeling for objective fact. In short, the peculiar quality of his greatness reveals the quality of the fifth-century Attic mind.



CHAPTER III

THE PLAN AND METHODS OF THE *HISTORY*

AFTER the long but still inadequate introduction of the last two chapters (inadequate because the influence of the contemporary world on any man is of a complexity that defies all but the crudest analysis), we turn to the *History* itself. This transition from Thucydides' age to his work is necessarily abrupt, because it is impossible to follow his development step by step as Plato's, for instance, can to some extent be followed. Thus one is confronted, on the one hand, with many facts of his life and many tendencies of his age which have an obvious bearing on his completed work and, on the other hand, with the complicated and impersonal work itself. But to see exactly how the one set of facts concerning his life and age grew into the other fact which is his *History* is impossible, because the agent effecting the change, the mind of Thucydides, stands aloof and distant. Hence, if one analyze too much the thought of his age, one neglects the *History* as an organic whole. But if one be concerned with the *History* alone, it will seem to exist, as the works of Aristotle long seemed, as something apart from all else, born fully grown. But since this inescapable gulf exists, it must

be recognized. We shall therefore, so to speak, begin again and attempt to grasp the *History* as it is, and this chapter on its introductory sections will serve as an introduction to our study also.

The first sentences of the *History* were quoted at the start. Like the opening lines of other Greek writings — the swift, majestic introductions to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* or the wonderfully lucent scene at the start of the *Republic* — they tell much of the work. It will be recalled that after giving his name Thucydides says that he undertook his *History* because he foresaw, even at the outbreak, that the war would exceed any earlier conflict in importance. It was, he says, the greatest upheaval ever to afflict the Greek world. But it is characteristic of him that, instead of turning at once to the background and causes of the war, he pauses at the beginning to substantiate this first statement by an elaborate study of the remote past. He does so ostensibly because of the enormous fame of the Trojan War, and the next eighteen sections comprising the so-called Archaeology constitute, so far as form is concerned, not so much an introduction as a digression designed to support his view that the present war was vastly more serious. Such digressions occur frequently in the *History*, being the one means by which, in the absence of notes or appendices, a mind as sensitive as his to the demands of proof could substantiate its claims. Actually, however, the Archaeology expounds with such sweep and clarity what were to him the basic forces in the development of Greece that it forms an indispensable beginning to the *History*.

But before turning to the Archaeology it is necessary to say a word or two more of these first sentences. It will be remarked that Thucydides fails to say here that the war which he is about to describe lasted twenty-seven years and included not only the so-called Archidamian War, which came to an end in 421 with the delusive Peace of Nicias, but all the further hostilities down to the final surrender of Athens in 404. He first states this fact in so many words in the so-called second introduction prefaced to the narrative after the Peace of Nicias. The passage begins as follows: "The same Thucydides of Athens set down these events also in order as they occurred, by summers and winters, up to the time when the Lacedaemonians and their allies made an end to the empire of the Athenians and dismantled the long walls and the Piraeus."¹ He then goes on to defend the view that all the hostilities of this twenty-seven year period constituted one war, to reckon exactly how long the war lasted, and to state, in the sentences quoted earlier, that he had lived through it all.

Now his failure to say as much at the start has given rise, in the century that has elapsed since the writings of the Hamburg scholar, F. W. Ullrich,² to an extended, though (in the opinion of the present writer) largely mistaken, controversy in regard to the composition of the *History*. The view of Ullrich, revised and restated in a thousand ways by his successors, was that Thucydides wrote the first four and a quarter books of the *History* in the belief that the war had ended in 421 with

¹ V 26. 1.

² *Beiträge zur Erklärung des Thukydides*, Hamburg, 1846.

the Peace of Nicias, but that he later realized his mistake and, after the end of the war in 404, altered much of what he had written, appending the second introduction in the fifth book to justify his treatment of the whole conflict as one war. Nevertheless, the view continues, he died before completing his revision, and the work that we have contains many early passages harshly and inconsistently juxtaposed beside later passages. To attempt to refute this view in detail, as has been attempted elsewhere,³ would be a long and perhaps not over-profitable task. Suffice it to say that the main reason for believing that the *History* was composed not at widely scattered times but essentially at one time after 404 when the outcome of events had become clear, is to be found in its tight, organic development not only of certain leading ideas but of many minor themes as well. That fact, it is to be hoped, will be evident as we go on. That is not to say that Thucydides failed to make use of earlier notes; he inevitably did, and some of these notes may not tally in detail with his final opinions. Moreover, he evidently wrote with some difficulty, perhaps going back at times to insert new passages beside those already written, and he died without completing his work or even fully revising what we have of it. It is generally assumed that the main part of the fifth book (§§ 25–84) and all the eighth book, both of which lack speeches, are particularly incomplete, and the view may be correct, especially for the eighth book, although it seems not impossible that Thucydides may have intended to treat certain years in this unemphatic way,

³ In the last of the articles mentioned in the Foreword.

reserving his fullest emphasis for what were to him the great symptomatic events of the war. But in spite of these marks of incompleteness, it nevertheless seems inconceivable that he could have given so searching and so consistent a picture of how and why all the parties to the war (and Athens particularly) acted from first to last as they did, unless he was viewing the war clearly and as a whole. One instinctively assumes so brilliant and closely knit a work to be the product of one period of intense creation, but that assumption appears inescapable when a man's very opinions postulate a full knowledge of events. Would an historian writing, for instance, of Napoleon and Napoleonic France in 1800 at the time of Marengo have seen in the subject exactly what he saw in 1815, after Waterloo? Similarly, could Thucydides, after the Peace of Nicias in 421, have written in such a way of the strength and weakness of Athens that what he wrote then would have tallied exactly with what he wrote seventeen years later? The answer gives the basic grounds for believing in the unity of the *History*.

But there is another and minor argument to the same effect, which brings us back to the opening sections of the *History*. It was observed above that the Archaeology is not, properly speaking, an introduction but a digression designed to support Thucydides' initial statements regarding the magnitude of the war. The second introduction is likewise a digression on the idea, tacitly assumed from the first, that all the wars of the period comprised, in fact, a single struggle, and on how long in years, months, and days the struggle lasted. It fol-

lows that one need not expect Thucydides to have treated the unity and length of the war at the outset, as he might have, had he been writing a formal introduction. Given his rigorous methods, he would have had to go into these matters in some detail, as is clear from the second introduction, and the place where they properly and conveniently came up was after peace had seemingly been made. Readers who had just lived through the war would meanwhile hardly be uncertain what war he was referring to, and the second introduction cannot have broached an unfamiliar idea. But at the start he was not chiefly concerned with the length of the war as such, which he alludes to merely in passing (for instance, in the aorist of the second sentence — "this *was* in fact the greatest upheaval," and again in section 23). Absorbed with his initial train of thought and forced by his self-imposed standards to demonstrate its truth exactly, he allows the first three sentences to suffice as an introduction, and plunges at once into the argument, demanded alike by these sentences and by the work as a whole, that the magnitude of any war depends on the contemporary state of material civilization. It may be that, as the rhetorician Dionysius observed,⁴ he should have begun by tracing the history of Greece from the remote past to the present, instead of, as he does, dividing the subject between the Archaeology and the Pentecontaëtia,⁵ the latter of which, like the former, is simply a confirmatory digression. Had he done so, he would certainly have made a more conventional beginning and might also have described the subject of his work, that is, the

⁴ *To Pompeius* 3, 769–770 R.

⁵ I 89–118.

twenty-seven years of war, more explicitly. As it was, his pressing analytical mind set itself more searching goals, and these opening sentences stand witness to the fact not that he was ignorant of the length of the war when he wrote them but that the pressure of his thought dictated a procedure which had other merits than simple clarity. Since on any theory much of the first book was written after 404, one might after all assume that he would have revised this opening passage first of all, had he known that it did not phrase his view of the whole struggle.

These remarks do scant justice to the long-standing dispute on the composition of the *History*, which nevertheless will now be left on one side except as it comes up in passing. What has been said, however, may at least have cast some further light on the mind of Thucydides, as it reveals itself in these first sentences. The pressing succession of clauses, the breadth of the inferences made, the haste with which, having stated his concept of the war, he proceeds to verify it — all bespeak a mind, austere, swift, imperious, absorbed with the causal relation of events. These traits are the more evident if one compare the introduction of Herodotus, “Here are set forth the inquiries of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, [undertaken] in order that the deeds of men should not grow dim with time and that the great and wondrous monuments both of the Hellenes and of the barbarians should not become unrenowned, and also [to narrate] why they fought one another.” Herodotus, like Homer, looks to the past, seeking to preserve great deeds from oblivion. He even goes further and, like his

predecessor, the geographer Hecataeus, would celebrate also the monuments of men's skill. There is little here of proof, though he later says that he feels obliged to report what he has heard, whether he believes it or not.⁶ Thucydides, on the other hand, turns to the past, not (as we have seen) for its own sake, but in order to confirm his views on the present. He does not think of himself as a commemorator; he is not even, like Herodotus, wholly concerned with great events in themselves, but almost equally with their social and political causes. One could go on to contrast the quite different feeling for proof in the two introductions and their dissimilar pace and intensity. But what is perhaps more worth observing is the size, so to speak, of the canvas sketched by the two men. Herodotus will set forth not only a longer past but, geographically, a far wider world. In these reaches, his work may be said to resemble that of Aeschylus, as it does also in its emphasis on the religious and moral import of the events described. Thucydides, on the other hand, gives all but a few pages to the far narrower scene and briefer period of the Peloponnesian War and, even when he digresses, does so to illustrate forces then at work. His breadth is not that of time or space but of representative action and lasting tendency. Thus his work resembles the bounded but intense plays of Sophocles, which take an action at its height and illuminate in swift succession the latent natures of all who are involved in it. Just so, Thucydides takes the states of Greece and, particularly, Athens at their height and reveals in the responses of each to the fierce

⁶ II 123. 1, IV 195. 2, VII 152. 3.

demands of these twenty years the potentialities long inherent in their ways of life and government.

Something has been said already concerning both the occasion for the Archaeology and the reasoning on which it is based. Formally, this analysis of the weakness of Greece in earlier times justifies Thucydides' claims concerning the magnitude of the present war. His method is to postulate the kind of society that would have been appropriate to men's habits and standards in earlier times, as these were known either by tradition or from surviving literary works. These facts constituted confirmatory pieces of evidence, called by him *τεκμήρια* or *σημεῖα*,⁷ but his basic reasoning follows the pattern of what is likely or natural. Like the Old Oligarch, he assumes that certain social characteristics necessarily imply a certain form of government.

But more important is the idea of progress to which the Archaeology gives expression. The idea is often said to be foreign to antiquity and was in fact less common than two other attitudes: on the one hand, the sense of decline from a happier past (an attitude natural to such troubled periods as those of Hesiod or of the youthful Horace and Virgil) and, on the other hand, the concept, best expressed by Plato, that societies rise and decline cyclically, as they approximate or depart from the norms of just government.⁸ But that Athenians generally should have believed in progress through the great creative period of the mid fifth century is both natural in itself and well attested by our sources. In-

⁷ I 1. 3, 21. 1.

⁸ Cf. the successive constitutions sketched in *Republic* VIII and IX.

deed, as will be discussed later, an optimistic faith in man's developing powers inevitably accompanied the rise of democracy then, as it has in modern times. The tragedians are all concerned with the idea. Aeschylus' *Prometheus* and *Eumenides*, Sophocles' great ode on the triumphs of man in the *Antigone*,⁹ the speech of Theseus in Euripides' *Suppliants*,¹⁰ the lost *Palamedes* of each of the three dramatists, and the *Sisyphus* of Critias, all in one way or another betray the sense that modern times surpass all times before. Plato represents the sophist Protagoras as discussing the rise of civilization,¹¹ and the tract *On Ancient Medicine* traces the slow growth in the art of healing in a critical and even a patronizing spirit. Thucydides' accuracy will therefore hardly be doubted when in the *History* Pericles too speaks of Athens' achievements as beyond anything ever known,¹² and when Diodotus, in a passage quoted in the last chapter, sketches the evolution of law in much the same spirit as that of the tract *On Ancient Medicine*.¹³ The attitude which Thucydides imputes to these men corresponds exactly to his own in the *Archaeology*, and there can be no doubt that it reflects the general sense of great contemporary progress that surrounded him in his youth. But when he states a little later that his work will be valuable to future generations because history repeats itself,¹⁴ it is clear that he finally adopted a cyclical view of history very much like Plato's. He had seen the brilliant material progress of Athens checked

⁹ Lines 332-364.

¹⁰ Lines 195-218.

¹¹ *Protagoras* 320d-328c.

¹² II 41.

¹³ III 45.

¹⁴ I 22. 4.

and squandered, in the course of the war, by a social instability bred of that very progress, and he traces the process of eclipse with an insight which originates, one could almost say, in surprise. The cyclical view of history was virtually forced upon him by events. On both historical and literary grounds, it is therefore extraordinarily apt that, at the very outset of his work when he is about to recreate the state of Greece at the start of the war, he should thus conjure up the idea of progress. The Archaeology explains why, as a young man, he foresaw the magnitude of the war and, by some unconscious process of reversion, may well express much of his earlier reasoning. At least it conveys quite purely that confident admiration for the present which breathes through the Funeral Oration and in contrast to which the later narrative is even darker than it otherwise would be.

The argument of the Archaeology is, in brief, as follows:

In very early times no settled life existed. Men fought over the better land, and since it was not adequately fortified, the weak were constantly forced out. Attica, where the soil was poor, provides the exception proving the rule. For the same people were able to maintain themselves there permanently. In this purely tribal stage, there existed as yet no sense of common Greek nationality. The period came to an end only when Minos, by creating a navy, enforced the conditions of settled life. (That piracy had been extremely common is shown

by the fact that in Homer it involves no stigma.¹⁵ In western Greece, where men still carry arms, one sees a living remnant of a way of life once quite general. Indeed, it is not many generations since Athenians gave up carrying arms and assumed luxurious habits of dress and adornment. The Spartans, on the other hand, early adopted the soberer dress common at the present, as well as the fashion of exercising stript. The earlier Greek habits in this connection more resemble the barbarian habits of the present.)¹⁶

With the naval domination of Minos, men were for the first time sufficiently peaceful to acquire wealth. Instead of living inland through fear of piracy, they now built walls and occupied advantageous positions by the sea. These new foundations, by fostering commerce, further raised the level of civilization, the weak meanwhile submitting to the strong, not only through force but for the sake of profit. Similar financial authority and naval power (not, as has been said, the oaths of the suitors) enabled Agamemnon later to muster the Trojan expedition. Nevertheless, from Homer's catalogue of ships it is evident that this expedition, representing as it did the full power of Greece, fell far below the standard of the present war. (It has, indeed, been assumed from the small remains of Mycenae that Agamemnon's power must have been

¹⁵ This interesting use of the Homeric poems purely as historical documents (I 5. 2) is repeated in 3, 2, 10. 4, and III 104.

¹⁶ I 2-6.

small, but the inference is incorrect, since the small remains of Sparta would give no indication of her actual power.) The real difficulty of the Trojan expedition was the relative poverty of the times. The Greek force could not be adequately provisioned, and hence a part of it was always foraging away from Troy.¹⁷

After the Trojan War fell the troubled period of invasions, followed in turn by that of colonization in Ionia and the west, and only gradually were the conditions of settled life restored. With the increase of trade, great advances were made once more, particularly at Corinth, which was very powerful commercially (the trireme was invented there). Somewhat later Samos likewise acquired naval power, and later still the Phocaeans of Massilia, the Syracusans, Corcyreans, and Athenians. These successive navies continued the main source of dominion in Greece, military undertakings being for the most part brief and local. Nevertheless, even these earlier naval developments did not totally fulfil their promise, having been checked, in the case of Corinth, by the rise of the somewhat unadventurous tyrants and, in the case of Samos, by the Persians. Only in Sicily occurred any considerable development of power. Eventually, however, largely through Sparta's efforts, the strength of the tyrants was broken. (Sparta alone maintained her normal form of government continuously and owed her position to that fact.) Finally, after

¹⁷ I 7-11.

the Persian wars, the naval state of Athens and the military state of Sparta emerged as the dominating forces in Greece. Athens created an empire and Sparta a league of oligarchic cities subordinate, if not tributary, to herself. Whether against each other or their rebellious allies, both states gained great experience in arms during the fifty years before the war.¹⁸

Such is the argument of the Archaeology, and its insight must strike one as most remarkable. The scheme of historical development is in all essentials that followed today (the chief exception being that Thucydides seems to connect the period of invasions with the somewhat later period of colonization). More striking still is the understanding of earlier society that it reveals. Only very recently has the way of life underlying the early epic poetry of Greece and of modern Europe been looked at with a similar realism. And that Thucydides reached these conclusions from very broken evidence and states them with trenchancy and breadth is doubly remarkable when one considers how glorious the tradition of the Homeric world remained even among his contemporaries. But these merits of the Archaeology concern us less than the formative ideas of the *History* which are first expressed here.

First, there is the concept that settled life and material progress are possible only through political unification, which in practice meant forcible control by some central authority. As Minos and Agamemnon in earlier

¹⁸ I 12-18.

times delivered Greece from a state of extreme localism and thus created the settled conditions necessary for commerce and the arts of peace, so, it is implied, has Athens, and to an even higher degree. Before Minos only transitory and shifting settlements had existed, but, when he made navigation safe, strong communities grew up in places convenient for trade, and, though this meant that the weak must accept dominion by the strong, they were glad to do so for the higher standard of living which resulted. The expedition that Agamemnon led against Troy was of a size of which only a settled and therefore a centralized society would be capable. Now, in the present war, Sparta pictured herself as the liberator of Greece, that is, the restorer of local independence to the many cities controlled or menaced by Athens.¹⁹ The characteristically Greek desire for autonomy is often and sympathetically portrayed by Thucydides, but the Archaeology, like many following passages, shows that this simple question of independence versus subjection was not, to him, all that was at stake in the war. The great material progress of his time was inconceivable to him as apart from Athens' control of the subject cities. For the Athenian empire, rather than the backward land-states led by Sparta, was the progressive force in the period — how much so appears in his confident belief, to be discussed in the next chapter, that Athens should have won the war easily. In short, in the Archaeology he reads back into the time of Minos and Agamemnon that crucial problem which bewitched all Greek history: how the full sovereignty of smaller states was compatible with unification and progress.

¹⁹ I 139. 3.

It might be objected that, in assuming that unification could be had only when one strong state exerts its control over others, Thucydides neglects the possibilities of voluntary coöperation. But that issue, to his mind, was dead, at least so far as the Delian League was concerned, since he notes with some bitterness in the Pentacontaëtia that the Ionian states through their own sloth and weakness early surrendered complete leadership to Athens.²⁰ This disparity in vigor between the Ionians and the Athenians is a crucial and tragic fact of the period. The living issue to Thucydides was, therefore, not the presence or absence of control by Athens, but rather the mildness or despotism of her control, and, as we shall see, one of the central themes of the *History* concerns exactly this transition from the doctrines of generous leadership enunciated in the Funeral Oration to those of naked absolutism expressed in the Melian Dialogue. Thucydides has often been compared with Machiavelli in his detached and, in some respects, amoral attitude towards power. But he is not Machiavellian in the ordinary sense of the word: that is, he is not solely concerned with the acquisition and the use of power but rather, as the Archaeology shows, with its significance in the history of civilization. For to him power meant unification and unification material progress, and if therefore Athens was in one sense a tyrant city, as her enemies alleged, she was equally the teacher and guide of Greece.

A second idea propounded in the Archaeology which has a vast bearing on the work as a whole concerns the part played by naval power in Greek history. Its early development by Minos and Agamemnon gave rise to the

²⁰ I 99. 3.

first marked advances in civilization, and it was of equal moment for the rebirth of Greek culture following the period of the invasions. In listing the great navies of Greece in section fourteen Thucydides concludes with the Athenian, mentioning the well-known fact that Themistocles was its originator. Later in the first book he says in so many words that Themistocles, by fortifying the Piraeus and making Athens primarily a naval state, laid the foundations of the empire.²¹ It need hardly be said that Pericles continued the work of his predecessor. His strategy in the war was a naval strategy, and his whole policy in transforming Athens into a commercial democracy was based on control of the sea. It follows, therefore, that, to the historian, Themistocles had rediscovered and Pericles reapplied the ancient secret of empire in Greece. But to speak of naval power to any Greek of Thucydides' time was to speak of the lower classes, the ναυτικὸς ὄχλος, and therefore of democracy. "To begin with," says the Old Oligarch, "I say that the poorer classes and the demos rightly possess more authority than the well-born and the rich, because it is the demos that rows the ships and makes the city powerful. The pilots, the boatswains, the captains of penteconters, the rowmen, the shipbuilders, these strengthen the city far more than the hoplites, the nobles, and the well-bred."²² And in fact, of course, Themistocles and Pericles, the proponents of the navy, were likewise the leaders of the popular party. The Old Oligarch is right when he says that the lower classes

²¹ I 93. 4.

²² Pseudo-Xenophon, *Constitution of Athens* I 2.

were politically important in Athens because the empire was based on them. To Thucydides, therefore, the idea of naval supremacy was inevitably associated with that of democracy. He remarks, it will be recalled, that Corinth had earlier failed to fulfil her promise as a naval power because of the cramping policy of the tyrants.²³ One concludes that one reason, to his mind, why Athens had achieved more fully than any earlier state the political and material advances which had always followed from the possession of naval power was to be found in her developed democracy. This line of thought attains its fullest expression in the Funeral Oration, where Pericles finds the key to Athens' enormous achievements in the liberated energy of her citizens. More will be said of that later. The important point here is that, in the *Archaeology*, Thucydides sets the strength of Athens in the perspective of Greek history, and by giving as its cause a naval supremacy which in turn implied democracy, raises the fundamental question of his work: namely, how strong the democracy of Athens, the source of her power, was to prove politically.

This point leads to the last of the leading ideas adumbrated in the *Archaeology*. Thucydides remarks that Sparta, though not a naval state, had nevertheless been extremely strong because of her stable institutions.²⁴ He notes, however, the old-fashioned simplicity both of Spartan life and of the actual town of Sparta, and over and over again this picture of the city as a stalwart but antiquated force in the Greek world returns. "Your ways are old-fashioned as compared with theirs," say

²³ I 17.²⁴ I 18. 1.

the Corinthians at the assembly of the Peloponnesian League. "But in politics, as in mechanics, the new inevitably displaces the old."²⁵ It follows from the great importance which Thucydides attached to material progress that he thought Sparta outmoded as a power and no longer fitted for her ancient position of leadership. Indeed, never having been a naval state, she had been strong, to his mind, for no positive reason but for the negative reason that she was well governed when the rest of Greece was under the fettering control of the tyrants. For he expressly says that, in Greek experience, no great empire had ever been founded on land-power.²⁶ One returns, therefore, to the conclusion reached in the last paragraph, that Athens, whose dominion rested on a basis justified by the whole course of Greek history, should not only have defeated Sparta but have displaced her as the mistress of the Greek world. Nevertheless, he identifies in the Archaeology the one element which was Sparta's strength and was to prove the weakness of Athens: namely, stability of government. As we have seen, the greatness of Athens was, to him, dependent on her being a democracy, not only or chiefly because the poorer classes were the backbone of the fleet but because freedom alone could supply men individually with the self-confidence and vigor which were necessary for the maintenance of Athens' far-flung interests. He was not blind, however, to the weaknesses which could develop in a democracy through popular pressure and under the strain of war. When, therefore, he later finds the cause of Athens' defeat, neither in the strength of

²⁵ I 71. 2-3.

²⁶ I 15. 2.

her enemies nor in her own lack of resources, but in the mistakes of Pericles' more violent successors,²⁷ he returns to the same factor to which he had pointed in the *Archaeology* as the source of Sparta's strength.

The connection between political unity and material progress, the significance in Greek history of naval power (a power best achieved by a democracy), and the importance of stable government, these are the nerves of the *History* as a whole first revealed in the *Archaeology*. As a study of the remote past, it is undoubtedly colored by the author's attitude to the present, as all historiography probably is to some extent. Nevertheless, Thucydides transcends the more obvious vices of such an attitude both by the rigor of his methods and by the largeness of the principles which he invokes. There can be little doubt that these principles form part of what he refers to just beyond as the recurrent teachings of history.

We pass now to the famous section which follows on the method and purpose of the work. Just before it, Thucydides restates his belief in the supreme magnitude of the present war and his confidence in the essential picture which he has given of early Greece. This affirmation prompts him to glance, with amusing and quite characteristic irony, at those who easily accept all tradition, even such local and verifiable tradition as that Harmodius and Aristogeiton killed Hippias rather than Hipparchus, or who believe "the poets' gilding songs or what the logographers have written less for the sake of truth than to lend charm to their recitations."²⁸ This

²⁷ II 65.

²⁸ I 21. 1.

last remark evidently applies to Herodotus, two of whose statements had just been singled out for criticism. "While a war is going on," Thucydides adds, "people always think it the greatest ever to have been fought, but, when it is over, they go back to admiring the past." The scholiast on the digression on the conspiracy of Cylon later in the first book somewhat mysteriously observes, "here the lion laughed,"²⁹ and the remark comes to mind at this and a few other passages where Thucydides finds a dry amusement, not unmixed with annoyance, in the follies of mankind. But whether his strictures of his contemporaries are wholly just may be doubted. At least, Pericles too is made to speak, no doubt authentically, of the supreme brilliance of the present as compared with the past, and even Thucydides' careful methods were by no means alien to the spirit of the time.

The actual statement of his method falls into two parts: first, on what basis he has composed his speeches, and then what evidence underlies his narrative. He concludes by stating the purpose of the *History*. Something has been said of the passage already, but because of its extreme importance we may here look into it in some detail.

It begins as follows: "As for the speeches delivered by the several statesmen before and during the war, it proved difficult for me to report the exact substance of what was said, whether I heard the speeches myself or learned of them from others. I have therefore made the speakers express primarily what in my own opinion was

²⁹ I 126. 3.

called for under the successive circumstances, at the same time keeping as close as possible to the general import of what was actually said."³⁰

The first thing perhaps that strikes one in these sentences is Thucydides' fundamental desire for accuracy, the same desire which he had expressed in the section preceding and, indeed, from the outset. Nevertheless, because it proved impossible to report the exact substance of what was said — τὴν ἀκρίβειαν αὐτὴν τῶν λεχθέντων — he makes no claim to do so. What he has failed to report seems not entirely clear; presumably, the wording and structure of the originals. It has been suggested that he sometimes gives as one speech what was originally two or three speeches,³¹ though that may be stretching his words too far. But at least he has given himself a good deal of latitude. For he goes on to say that, though he has kept as close as possible to the general import of what was said (the clause, it should be noted, has a purely secondary, limiting force), he has caused his speakers to say primarily what he himself thought called for at each stage of events. In the phrase "what was called for" (literally "the things necessary," τὰ δέοντα), one obviously reaches the crux of the passage, since this is what the speeches chiefly contain. Unfortunately the connotation of the words is somewhat difficult to fix. Most commentators have given them an entirely political meaning. Speaking later of Themis-

³⁰ I 22. 1. The view presented here is in essential agreement with A. Grosskinsky, "Das Programm des Thukydides," and H. Patzer, "Das Problem der Geschichtsschreibung des Thukydides und die thukydideische Frage" (*Neue deutsche Forschungen*, respectively 1936 and 1937).

³¹ Grosskinsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-41.

toles, the historian calls him supremely able to conceive "what was called for" — *κράτιστος αὐτοσχεδιάζειν τὰ δέοντα* ³² — and, from the context, he is evidently thinking of Themistocles' ability to see the decisive elements in any practical situation. Hence the words presumably have the same meaning here. Thucydides therefore means that he has set forth in any given speech those broad considerations, political, social, historical or even psychological in character, on which, to his mind, the choice of policy at a given moment depended. In other words, the speeches contain an analysis of the principal factors in the war, as these appeared at different times to the leaders of the several states or to opposing leaders in any one state. The speeches, therefore, are in no sense detailed copies of actual speeches; for, if they had been, they would not have contained Thucydides' own estimate of a situation. On the other hand, neither do they set forth his personal views; otherwise they would not have been limited to the standpoint of the actual speakers. They may be described as expounding what Thucydides thought would have seemed to him the factors in a given situation, had he stood in the place of his speakers.

But a further point of interpretation remains which does not alter so much as clarify the meaning of the passage: namely, the rhetorical connotation which the words "what was called for," *τὰ δέοντα*, had for him. In speaking of Themistocles in the passage just cited, he expresses his amazement at the sheer genius whereby, without any formal training and on the spur of the

³² I 138. 3.

moment, he could see and expound "what was called for," τὰ δέοντα — that is, as we have seen, the decisive elements in a situation (which are further defined just before as having to do with the probable future course of events). Thucydides' astonishment is the more striking because both Pericles and Antiphon are later said to have had the same ability.³³ Thucydides uses virtually the same words of the three men, except that in the case of the latter two he expresses no surprise. Antiphon the professional rhetorician and Pericles the friend of sophists and philosophers were clearly not untrained as speakers, and their powers of estimating and expounding the elements of a situation were therefore admirable but not astonishing, whereas Themistocles' similar powers seemed almost incredible. A few other passages bear on the question. Gorgias in the *Helen* appears to use τὸ δέον to describe a speaker's reasoning,³⁴ and in Plato's *Phaedrus*,³⁵ where Socrates is about to analyze the speech just read to him, he clearly refers to its argumentation as opposed to its language in Thucydides' manner by the words τὰ δέοντα. But a final passage from the *History* is more informative, that at the end of the present paragraph where he says that his work will set forth the nature of coming events.³⁶ Now the untutored Themistocles is said to have seen just that. "He was," says the historian, "a supreme judge of present policies

³³ II 60. 5, VIII 68. 1.

³⁴ Diels-Kranz, *Vorsokratiker*⁵, II, fg. 11, 2.

³⁵ 234e 6.

³⁶ "But if it [my work] be found useful by those who wish to know the exact nature of events that once took place and, by reason of human nature, will take place again in similar or analogous form, that is enough" (I 22. 4).

and supremely able to conjecture what would ensue even in the distant future.”³⁷ And Pericles, it has already been said, is expressly praised for his foresight;³⁸ indeed, the *History* largely concerns how correct that foresight was. When therefore, on the one hand, both these men are said to have had foresight and to have expounded τὰ δέοντα and, on the other hand, the *History* as a whole is to set forth the nature of future events and the speeches to contain τὰ δέοντα, it follows that τὰ δέοντα are the instruments of conveying the tendencies of society and human nature on which alone foresight can be based. But, as we saw, it seemed in the highest degree surprising that Themistocles should have been aware of these deep recurrent elements in experience which permit foreknowledge. Therefore knowledge of them must have been gained after his time, and, since that knowledge is used in speaking, it can hardly be dissociated from the sophistic movement. Accordingly, it seems clear, the words τὰ δέοντα have a partly rhetorical connotation.

Here it is necessary to recall what was said in the last chapter: namely, that the sophistic arguments from likelihood, from expedience, and from the law of nature were more than mere tools of persuasion. They seemed to provide a searching (one had almost said, a scientific) insight into human nature. The grip of the sophists on the thought of the later fifth century is hardly to be explained on any other assumption. These arguments, moreover, appeared the more valuable because they were wholly directed to the practical tasks of speaking

³⁷ I 138. 3.

³⁸ II 65. 5 and 13.

and hence of government. Sophistic rhetoric had arisen because, in the changed conditions of the time, it seemed to furnish speakers with the means of estimating human conduct and calculating the probable course of events. It was not, therefore, as we tend to think that rhetoric is, an art of adornment unconnected with thought; it was as much concerned with thought as with expression, uniting both into an effective, practical instrument. When, therefore, Thucydides says that he has caused his speakers to say "what was called for," τὰ δέοντα, using the term in a half-rhetorical sense to signify the main lines of reasoning possible under various circumstances, that does not mean that he is not also using the words in the political sense described above. So completely was rhetoric the vehicle of political thought. The fact that the term τὰ δέοντα had to him only one meaning, whereas we can detect two, shows rather how exclusive an instrument of political analysis the argumentation of his time seemed to him to be.

This profound validity which he felt that argumentation to possess in many ways gives the key to his speeches. One can say that they are in purpose something like the *Tetralogies* of Antiphon: that is, compressed examples of the reasoning to be followed under different circumstances, though they are at the same time more than that, because they both convey the point of view of actual speakers and are the main means of presenting the compelling forces in the history of the time. It is as if Thucydides had made a virtue of a necessity by saying that, if his speeches could not have the merit of exact truth, they would at least have the

merit of clarifying the main reasons for events. And since his work as a whole is to acquaint men with the recurrent forces in history, then the speeches became to him the main means to that end. It is in this way that he effects the union between the specific and the generic which was referred to in the last chapter as vital to his thought. Doubtless such other passages as the Archaeology or the description of the revolutionary mind³⁹ likewise do so; doubtless also the prognostic value of the book lies to some extent in the mere pattern of the events which it describes. Nevertheless, the arguments of the speeches, precisely because they embody that searching and realistic estimate of human behavior introduced by the sophists, must have been to Thucydides the primary link between his narrative and what he considered its deeper teachings.

A few final deductions concerning the speeches thus become possible. In the first place, because they embody arguments of a fundamental character, they may be expected to play an organic, even an interrelated, part in the work as a whole. It will appear in the following chapters that many speeches look to one another and that in some Thucydides even violates reality by ascribing to one speaker a knowledge of what another was even then saying some distance away.⁴⁰ The fact should not be surprising, since, granted the searching nature of the arguments, the speeches naturally possess a significance in some sense transcending their immediate circumstances. At the same time, many speeches appear in

³⁹ III 82-83.

⁴⁰ For example, II 87-89.

pairs, partly because they reflect actual debates, but partly also because the coupling of arguments more clearly reveals their contrasting implications. As we saw, this form of antithetical debate had a strong influence on fifth-century thought from the time of Protagoras on. But if these tendencies inherent in the nature of Thucydides' arguments seem to rob the speeches of veracity, there are other and strong considerations to the contrary. For if the sophistic arguments were in any sense as widely known as has been represented, then they constitute in themselves strong proof of his veracity. The many correspondences between the speeches and the actual writings of the years in question prove, if they prove anything, that his concept of oratory was formed in the very period of which he wrote and thus, in the main, well represents the manner of speaking then common. That may not be the case, to be sure, of speeches delivered by Spartans, Corinthians, Syracusans, and others. These men actually spoke in their own dialects and, though we know little on the subject, were presumably less versed than Athenians in the contemporary forms of argument. But, as will appear in a later chapter,⁴¹ Athenians at least probably did not vary enormously in their manner of oratory. Lysias had not as yet evolved his concept that the style should be suited to the speaker, nor had Plato and Isocrates advanced their more complex theories of style and argumentation. Rather, these men thought of the oratory that preceded them as rigid and uniform.⁴² If, then, the speeches do

⁴¹ Chapter VII below.

⁴² *Phaedrus* 235a-b, 264b-266b. Isocrates, XIII 10 and 12.

occasionally violate reality and fulfil a larger function of contrast and interpretation in the work as a whole, they can be fundamentally veracious, at least in the case of Athenians. That is merely to say that we are dealing here with two kinds of veracity: the one of circumstance, the other of outlook and attitude. The former Thucydides sometimes violated, though even here one must remember that he kept to the import of what was actually said. The latter he maintained, because he could not by his nature be unveracious but, even more, because he was raised in the same tradition of oratory as his Athenian speakers.

Finally, the speeches have a value quite relative to the speakers and the circumstances, and their deeper meaning (so Thucydides seems to suggest) will be apparent only to readers gifted with political insight. The first point is obvious, though sometimes neglected. For when he expressly limits himself to the points of view actually advanced by the several speakers, he is evidently committed to giving their judgment, not his own. Thus it is incorrect to read his approval into all the opinions advanced in the *History*; in fact, it is impossible, since the frequent pairing of speeches means that they convey opposite opinions. How, then, may one penetrate this enigmatic surface and find what Thucydides considered the core of truth beneath? The answer is not easy; for one must remember that, whatever their deeper meaning, the speeches always and primarily recreate an actual dilemma which confronted statesmen at a given time and of which none of them could know the solution. Quite as much as the characters of tragedy, Thucydides' speak-

ers face an uncertain future and reveal their wisdom or their folly by the course which they advocate. This plan, strange to our conception of history, undoubtedly seemed natural to him (he probably imagined no other), precisely because he wished to reconstruct the actual course of events, believing that only from reality could any permanent lesson be drawn. The reader, then, is much in the position of the speakers, since he too must decide at any given moment which course is desirable. Yet, needless to say, he is more fortunate; for the later narrative quickly shows the result of earlier decisions, and Thucydides also does not entirely withhold his own judgment. Such passages as the Archaeology, the statement of the causes of the war,⁴³ the appraisal of Pericles,⁴⁴ and the description of the war's brutalizing effect,⁴⁵ definitely express the historian's own views and, by so doing, offer a standard by which to interpret the speeches. For instance, we have already seen that, in the Archaeology, Thucydides states the prime importance both of empire and of naval power in Greek history and also that the latter idea is inseparable from his concept of democracy as the energizing force which made Attic naval power possible. When therefore Pericles, held up as an example of foresight, explains the function both of the Athenian navy and of democracy, one is justified in believing that his views coincide with the historian's. Or conversely, after Thucydides has sketched the brutalizing effect of war, it is incorrect to conclude that the doctrine of naked power advanced in the Melian Dialogue represents his views. It merely pictures views then

⁴³ I 23.⁴⁴ II 65.⁴⁵ III 82-83.

actually held by the speakers. But such interpretations of the meaning of the *History* must be reserved for the next chapters. Here it is merely necessary to see that the speeches have a value relative to the speakers and to the stage of the conflict which they represent, and that only the course of the war, coupled with Thucydides' direct statements, can show which speeches convey his own judgment. But in this fact probably inheres what he considered the usefulness of his book. He himself analyzes some of the forces at work in the war, concurs in the judgment of certain of his speakers, but in all cases, whether he considered his speakers wise or foolish, shows the larger reasons on which their policies were based. He expects that his readers will be men of political interests faced with analogous problems in the future, and he leaves a manual of statecraft for their use.

It remains, then, to speak of the final sentences in the paragraph on his method. Having described the speeches and stated that detailed accuracy (*ἀκρίβεια*) cannot be expected in them, he goes on to say that in his narrative, on the other hand, he has spared no effort to achieve complete fidelity. "As for the events of the war, I did not consider it proper to report them on the information of any chance witness, but [I have reported] only what I myself saw or learned from others, after testing their information in detail with the greatest possible care. The truth was hard to discover because reports of the same event by different witnesses were not identical but varied with the observer's memory or bias." ⁴⁶

⁴⁶ I 22. 2-3.

In the narrative then, if not in the speeches, Thucydides has maintained an ideal of absolute and rigidly tested truth. It is interesting to observe his method as he expresses it here. Negatively, he has avoided Herodotus' practice of reporting any chance story. Positively, he relies either on his own personal observation or on the tested reports of witnesses, presumably several in each case, since the variation in their reports much impressed him. These informants were men from both sides. So much appears from his previously mentioned statement in the fifth book to the effect that his exile had the advantage of enabling him to talk with the enemy.⁴⁷ His difficulties as well as the resource with which he met them are illustrated in another passage of the fifth book, where, after telling how the Spartans with characteristic secretiveness concealed their numbers at the battle of Mantinea, he goes on to analyze the organization of the Spartan army and thus to achieve a fairly exact reckoning.⁴⁸

His extraordinary care in gathering less important details could be illustrated from many passages such as the following from the account of the Ambracian army in the second book: "Their barbarian contingents consisted of a thousand Chaonians who, being a people without kings, were lead by Photius and Nicanor, the members of the ruling house who enjoyed the magistracy for that year. With them came the Thesprotians, also a kingless people. The Molossians and Atitanians were commanded by Sabylinthus, the guardian of the King Tharyps who was still a child, and the Parauaeans by

⁴⁷ V 26. 5.

⁴⁸ V 68.

their King Oroedus.”⁴⁹ Another type of passage shows his interest in geographical facts learned presumably either by his own efforts or from works on the subject: for instance, the following on the army of the Thracian King Sitalces: “His rule extended, in the direction of the independent Paeonians, as far as the Paeonic Laeaeans and the Strymon river, which flows from Mount Scombrus through the territory of the Laeaeans and the Agriani. In the direction of the Triballi, likewise independent, the boundary is formed by the Treres and Tiltari who live to the north of Mount Scombrus extending westward as far as the river Oscius. The latter rises in the same mountains as the Nestus and the Hebrus, a huge deserted range adjoining Rhodope.”⁵⁰ When one reflects how constantly such details are given and what care was demanded in acquiring them, their unobtrusive presence in the *History* inspires unfailing amazement. Like the more important facts, such as the names of generals and the number of troops at crucial engagements or the exact wording of treaties,⁵¹ they reveal how

⁴⁹ II 80. 5-6.

⁵⁰ II 96. 3-4. Cf. L. Pearson, “Thucydides and the Geographical Tradition,” *Classical Quarterly*, 33 (1939), pp. 48-54.

⁵¹ For stylistic reasons, ancient historians did not commonly include original documents in their texts. Accordingly, the parts of the *History* which contain such documents (IV 118-119, V 18-19, 23-24, 47, 77-79) have sometimes been regarded as not in their final form. But this inference is highly doubtful, both because of Thucydides’ prevailing desire for accuracy and because of the importance of the documents themselves, which are the treaties preceding, attending, and following the Peace of Nicias. It seems likely that Thucydides looked on these treaties as marking crucial stages of the war, even as his speeches marked other such stages. Moreover, he conspicuously refers to the documents with some such concrete phrase as *τάδε* or *αὐταὶ αἱ σπονδαί*, in contrast to the vaguer *τοιάδε* with which he introduces the speeches. While using the speeches and the documents for a somewhat

seriously the preceding statement on the accuracy of the narrative was meant.

But one other point of some importance for his narrative must be mentioned in this connection, namely, his system of chronology. Confronted as he was with a variety of calendars in use in the various Greek states (the official Attic year beginning in midsummer, the Spartan in the autumn, and so on) and with the additional difficulty that these calendars, being based on lunar months, varied markedly from year to year, he abandoned them entirely. Or rather, he used them just once to fix the outbreak of the war with reference to the official Attic and Spartan years and to the list of priestesses in the temple of Hera at Argos.⁵² Thereafter he calculated by years of the war, which he subdivided in turn into a winter and a summer season.⁵³ Within these subdivisions he is often more precise, dating events as near the beginning or end, at the early harvest or late vintage. On the other hand, his system precludes his giving exact dates, forcing him to fix events primarily by their sequence. It need hardly be said that such a system hampers his narrative. The description of the long siege of Plataea, for instance, thus falls under three separate years. But he adopted it consciously and doubtless with a full understanding of its limitations. Thus when he finds fault with the chronology of Hel-
lanicus,⁵⁴ it is quite evident that he thinks his own

similar purpose, he was therefore quite conscious of their essentially different character.

⁵² II 2. 1.

⁵³ For attempts to fix these periods exactly, cf. Classen-Steup⁵, I, *Introd.* pp. lvii-lix.

⁵⁴ I 97. 2.

standards far superior. At the same time, when he confesses in the final sentence of the present section that his work will be less attractive, because less fabulous, than those of his predecessors, one concludes that he realized well how cramping these same standards were, even as they revealed themselves in his chronology. Nevertheless, his satisfaction in his system is very great. He several times points out that it enabled him to achieve more reliable reckonings than any which might have been based on official calendars.⁵⁵ In short, his chronology reflects the same ideal of accuracy that is expressed in this whole section and revealed in great and small ways throughout the book. And if such details, whether of fact or of chronology, sometimes break the thread of important happenings, they supplied, he undoubtedly felt, the sole basis for any larger estimate of the war. They also reveal a side of his mind which was concerned not with judgment but with fact alone.

The section concludes with words as famous as any in the *History*: "The absence of the fabulous will, I fear, detract from the charm of my work. But if it be found useful by those who wish to know the exact nature of events that once took place and, by reason of human nature, will take place again in similar or analogous form, that is enough. My work has been composed, not for the applause of today's hearing, but as a possession forever."⁵⁶ The first sentence repeats his passionate contempt for those who found fable easier than truth and the past greater, because more golden, than the present. The second states his belief that history is both

⁵⁵ Notably V 25. 3, 26. 3.

⁵⁶ I 22. 4.

useful and scientific: useful, because posterity will find in the experience of the past some indication of the forces at work in their own day; scientific, because those forces are implicit in human nature and, as such, can be studied and recorded as something quite permanent.

This view, as we have seen, reflects a characteristic attitude of the Greek mind, an attitude which found truth neither in divine revelation nor in the purely material aspects of nature but rather in the observed traits of human character and the lasting tendencies of society. More particularly, the statement embodies a new sense which came into being in the latter half of the fifth century that conduct is predictable, that men of a certain sort tend to act in a certain way, that certain conditions will always produce certain results; in sum, that human nature too is subject to almost mechanistic laws. What those laws are can perhaps hardly be defined exactly. In reading the *History*, one feels that Thucydides was constantly trying to reduce the movements of society to some clear, orderly pattern, but that this pattern, suggested over and over again by recurrent themes and repeated situations, in the end always eluded him. That is not to say that he does not state what were to him the compulsive forces in the war. We have already observed in connection with the *Archaeology* what he considered some of these forces to be, and others will emerge in coming chapters. But over and above these specific tendencies, there is the sense that the social, as much as the individual, organism acts as a unit following the laws of its being, and perhaps the subtlest charm of Thucydides is constantly to suggest, if not to define,

these laws. Especially do the speeches, as has been said, serve this end. The searching commentaries which they give on social and individual conduct seem to lay bare the guiding nerves beneath events. That the thought and oratory of the time had, generally speaking, a similar object has already been argued. There can at least be no doubt that Thucydides, imbued as he was with the new teachings of the sophists, rested his work squarely on his estimate of human nature (*τὸ ἀνθρώπινον* in this passage), and predicted eternal usefulness for it because human nature in its cyclical course would forever bring back similar situations. At the same time, to his view, his work could not fulfil this function were it not absolutely truthful. Accuracy, congenial to him in itself, ultimately subserved this long-term object. Conscious then of these two merits, fidelity and depth, he makes the single boast of the *History*, a boast as Olympian as his usual reticence, that he has composed his work not for a day, but forever.



CHAPTER IV

THE OUTBREAK AND FIRST YEARS OF THE WAR

IN THE introductory sections of the *History* Thucydides is concerned, as we saw, chiefly with three subjects: the significance of the Peloponnesian War in Greek history, the methods adopted in his work, and his hopes for its future usefulness. But at the end of these sections he takes up still a fourth subject which has been reserved until now because of its close bearing on the whole following account of the outbreak and first years of the war, namely, his view of its causes. He divides these into two classes: first, the inciting incidents, called by him *αἰτίαι* and *διαφοραί*, “grievances” and “disputes,” which had taken place between Athens and Sparta’s ally, Corinth, over their respective spheres of influence, and then what he names “the truest but least talked of explanation,” the fear felt by Sparta herself for Athens’ growing power.¹

Incidents of the former kind did not necessarily mean war. In fact, the first of them, which occurred when Athens made an alliance with Corinth’s disaffected colony Corcyra, took place two years before the outbreak, and, though Corinth was enflamed at this loss of pres-

¹ I 23. 5-6.

tige and even more to see Athens now planted across the trade-routes to Sicily, there was little that she alone could do about it. The incident was only one more proof of Athens' commercial ambitions and of the fact that she was strong enough to profit by any dissensions in Greece. But when Sparta decided to support Corinth lest she herself lose her ancient leadership and before long become powerless to support anybody, that was far more serious. A war long brewing to determine whether Athens should pursue her growth unchecked until no state or combination of states could resist her was inevitable, and Greece reaped the consequences of that shift in the balance of power that had been taking place for fifty years, while Sparta, grown quiescent and unadventurous, had allowed Athens to overhaul and almost to outstrip her.

But more will be said of these matters presently. What is to be noted here is that the structure and treatment of the first book and a half are largely dictated by this view of the causes. Thus Thucydides first describes the inciting incidents carefully but without emphasis,² but then, since the war to him essentially concerned Athens' and Sparta's rival pretensions to mastery of Greece, rises to an elaborate study of each emphasized by many speeches and several digressions. Since Athens, further, was hardly separable from the figure of Pericles, this analysis may be said to continue past the outbreak of the war to the period of the Funeral Oration and Pericles' last speech. To no part of the *History* does Thucydides bring a surer touch or deeper

² I 24-66.

insight than to these opening episodes, and no part does more to lift his work from the plane of record to that of idea. This contrast between the two rival states will therefore form the subject of the present chapter. Their relative positions later changed as each reacted differently to the strain of war. But this great picture of Athens and Sparta at the start of the war gives the standard of reference for the whole later narrative and, in the case of Athens, shows why Thucydides saw in his native city the most progressive and promising state ever to rise in Greece.

The background of Athens' alliance with Corcyra, which was the first of the incidents leading to war, was briefly this.³ Corinth and Corcyra fell out about 436 over a local dispute between the democrats and oligarchs in the town of Epidamnus, better known by its later name Dyrrachium, on the Illyrian coast opposite the heel of Italy. Both had some pretense of justice: Corinth, because the local democrats had formally appealed to her for support against the exiled oligarchs, after Corcyra had refused a similar appeal; Corcyra, because she could hardly be expected to tolerate interference in the affairs of her own colony. Both states were evidently interested in the local and Italian trade of this admirably situated town. Both therefore sent forces in support of the opposing parties there, and a naval engagement followed, probably in the summer of 435, which the Corcyreans won. But that was not the end; for when Corinth during the next two years prepared a second and stronger expedition, Corcyra countered, as

³ I 24-31.

she had threatened to do,⁴ by proposing an alliance to Athens. This offer was made in the summer of 433. The quarrel immediately took on a graver aspect, since Corinth, if worsted, would in turn inevitably appeal to her ally Sparta. The whole affair offers a classic example of the dangers arising out of commercial competition in a nationalistic era.

But Corinth did not begin by turning to Sparta but rather by sending ambassadors to Athens to oppose the Corcyrean ambassadors who had brought their offer of alliance. The two delegations, as the custom was, were permitted to argue their cases before the Athenian assembly, and there follows the first debate recorded by Thucydides, the apparent faithfulness of which has already been noted. The attitude of the Corcyreans is perhaps most neatly expressed in the conclusion of their speech. "There being three navies of some magnitude in Hellas, yours, ours, and the Corinthians', if you allow two of these to merge and the Corinthians now take over ours, you will eventually have to fight against us and the Peloponnesians together. If on the other hand you protect us, you will face them with our numerous ships added to your own."⁵

They obviously assume that war is inevitable and that the sole question facing Athens is whether or not she wishes to embark on it with the greatest possible advantage. The Corinthians, on the other hand, reject this view and point to their own conciliatory behavior at the time of the Samian revolt eight years before, when many Peloponnesians had urged seizing the occasion to attack

⁴ I 28. 3.

⁵ I 36. 3.

Athens. As they sum up their position, "Advantage most accrues where least offense is given. The prospect of war with which they are frightening you into an act of aggression against us lies still in uncertainty. It is therefore not worth your while to take on an open and actual enmity with Corinth but, on the contrary, to quiet the suspicions long existent between us on account of Megara. A final kindness done at an opportune time, though small, can cancel a great score. Nor should you be attracted by their offer of a naval alliance. Care not to injure one's equals is a far firmer basis of power than any dangerous eminence got by pressing every temporary advantage."⁶ They clearly wish the Athenians to be contented with their control of the Aegean and not to menace Corinth's traditional priority in the trade with western Greece and Sicily. Had Athens been willing to do so, something like a permanent division of interest might have come about whereby she looked eastward and the Peloponnesians westward. But such an understanding was out of the question. Athens could hardly have sat by while Corinth built up a commercial ascendancy equal to her own, nor could any Athenian leader have convinced the people that certain regions of the Greek world were closed to them. More important still, there could be no sudden end either to the fears inspired in Athens by the ancient renown of the Dorian states, nor to those inspired in the Dorians by Athens' rapid rise to power. Given the nationalism of the era, only one answer to the proposal of the Corcyreans was possible.

⁶ I 42. 2-4.

Athens therefore accepted the alliance, though in an effort to avoid war she made it a purely defensive compact.⁷ By the Treaty of 445, which provided that any state not then an ally of Sparta or Athens might enter an engagement with either,⁸ she was within her rights. There was difficulty in the fact that Corcyra was Corinth's colony, though one that had long since abrogated even the half-religious ties normal to such a relationship. On the other hand, when the Corinthians claimed that they had left Athens a free hand with Samos and thus deserved similar consideration in return, the parallel was incorrect, since Samos was an ally of Athens but Corcyra was not an ally of Sparta and Corinth.

Thucydides sums up the Athenians' motives by saying that they did foresee war and thus welcomed having the Corcyrean navy on their side or, at the worst, seeing it used against Corinth in advance. "Besides," he says, "the island seemed to them well situated for the coastal voyage to Italy and Sicily."⁹ It is an interesting commentary on his method that he does not press the point harder. It is known from surviving inscriptions that Athens in 433 renewed certain treaties with Leontini in Sicily and Rhegium in south Italy,¹⁰ and Thucydides himself later says that Athenian forces had been active in northwest Greece some years before the present affair.¹¹ Indeed, for thirty years past Naupactus had furnished a base for the Athenian navy to the west of Corinth. Her infringement on Corinth's interests was therefore nothing new, and the later expeditions to

⁷ I 44. 1.

⁸ I 35. 2.

⁹ I 44. 3.

¹⁰ *I.G.* i². 51, 52.

¹¹ II 68. 7.

Sicily only carried further a policy already begun by this time. Hence it has been asserted that, by failing to emphasize here the importance of Athenian trade in the west, Thucydides shows his ignorance of the economic causes of the war.¹² But the criticism is unjust for two reasons: first because it is his settled method, as we saw in his introduction, to press forward with the matter in hand, leaving all minor questions (as Athens' relations to Sicily were at this time) until the moment when they became dominant, and second because economics were to him inseparable from politics. Thus, as will appear later, the chief cause of the Sicilian expedition was to his mind the desire of the ordinary Athenian for higher income in an extended empire. But the channel by which this economic motive showed itself was political and military. Athens would be prosperous if her control was widespread; the control came first. The same applies to the present alliance with Corcyra, which he viewed as immediately important for strategic reasons, though these to him ultimately included economic reasons as well.

But to return, Athens sent ten ships to support Corcyra with orders to act only defensively. The naval battle of Sybota followed in which Corinth was on the whole victorious, the Athenians participating only at the end of the day and then merely to guard the harbor. In the dusk of evening, however, when the Corinthians were about to press home their advantage, they sighted a fresh Athenian squadron of twenty ships and, fearing

¹² F. M. Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, London, 1907, pp. 1-76, and G. B. Grundy, *Thucydides and the History of His Age*, London, 1911, pp. 315-332. More will be said of this important point in the last chapter.

that these were only the first of a larger fleet, retired bitterly angry to have missed the fruits of their victory. Thus the battle ended by leaving the Corinthians in a rage of frustration and provided the first major grievance leading to war.¹³

The second incident was in many ways similar. Potidaea, situated in the Chalcidice at the neck of the westernmost peninsula Pallene, had been founded by Periander in the days of Corinth's greatest commercial power, but after the Persian Wars had joined the Delian League and was now tributary to Athens. But in Potidaea, unlike Corcyra, distance lent enchantment to the mother city, which had consequently maintained close bonds with its former colony. These bonds, consisting of annual magistrates sent out from Corinth, the Athenians ordered given up in the winter of 433/2. Certain of Corinth's hatred after the battle of Sybota, Athens was additionally fearful because the Macedonian Perdiccas was fostering revolt throughout this whole northern region of the empire. To make quite sure of the city, Athens therefore demanded that the Potidaeans dismantle the southern half of the city wall. They, however, gained time by appealing for leniency, while secretly sending to Sparta and Corinth for help. Thus it happened that before the walls were pulled down, Corinth raised and dispatched to Potidaea a force of some two thousand volunteers. Athens had certain forces in the north at the time which she strengthened during the summer of 432 by successive expeditions of two thousand and sixteen hundred hoplites (as readers

¹³ I 55. 2.

of the *Symposium* will remember, these included Socrates and the young Alcibiades). But the city resisted, as it continued to do for over two years, until late in 430, by which time the siege had cost Athens very heavily. But even at the start, the revolt caused the most violent animosity, this time as much in Athens as in Corinth. Here, accordingly, Thucydides found the second grievance leading to war.¹⁴

These incidents, then, had given rise to frictions of a sort often repeated in history: frictions of commercial and strategic rivalry in outlying regions, frictions of suppressed minorities supported from the homeland. But even these were not all. When Corinth, as was her privilege, convoked a meeting of the Peloponnesian League at Sparta for the purpose of presenting her complaints, representatives of other aggrieved states were present. Thucydides mentions the Aeginetans, technically no longer members of the League because surrendered to Athens by the Treaty of 445, but nevertheless Dorians by blood and hopeful of liberation. He also mentions representatives from the small manufacturing city Megara, which Athens by the so-called Megarean decree had recently excluded from trade within the empire. The significance of the decree has been much disputed. Aristophanes, followed by Ephorus and Plutarch, speaks of it as largely responsible for the war,¹⁵ whereas Thucydides makes rather little of it, probably rightly. Control of trade within the empire

¹⁴ I 66.

¹⁵ *Acharn.* 528-534, *Peace* 605-614. Plutarch, *Pericles* 31-32. Cf. G. L. Barber, *The Historian Ephorus*, Cambridge, 1935, pp. 106-112.

was presumably within Athens' rights. But it is in any case certain that Megara was now acting with Corinth, and the decree was passed after Corinth had first broken the treaty by aiding Potidaea. Technically, therefore, this show of strength probably did not put Athens in the wrong or at least make her the original aggressor. It seems to have been intended largely as a trading point if arbitration, provided for in the treaty,¹⁶ ever took place. Nevertheless, it was a strong step which added further bitterness to that already felt by Corinth and Aegina.

Now the constitution of the League almost certainly obliged Sparta to assist any member in a defensive, though not in an offensive, war.¹⁷ Stronger, however, than any such compulsion was Sparta's need to maintain her own ascendancy over her allies, which she could do in the last analysis only by fighting for them when they insisted sufficiently. As has been seen, Athens did not exceed her rights in the Corcyrean affair, and at Potidaea Corinth was the aggressor. To be sure, Athens was following a far from amicable course, and her ambitions were quite justly feared. Nevertheless, when Sparta was called on at the meeting of the League to declare a war of liberation against the tyrant city, there was no legal reason why she should have responded, and, when she did respond, it is proof that she did so fundamentally to maintain her own prestige. This fear on Sparta's part for Athens' growing power is what Thu-

¹⁶ I 78. 4, 140. 2.

¹⁷ Cf. J. A. O. Larsen, "The Constitution of the Peloponnesian League," *Classical Philology* 29 (1934), pp. 1-18.

Thucydides calls the essential cause of the war. It had been latent for many years but finally came to light as the compelling force in events when Sparta's allies were so enflamed that she could risk inaction no longer. Hence it is that in Thucydides' description of the council at Sparta, the inciting causes merge into the essential cause, and the first great theme of the *History*, the contrast between Athens and Sparta, becomes dominant.

As if to emphasize this new stage of his narrative, Thucydides for the first and only time gives four speeches in close succession, two delivered at the meeting of the League and two others at the Spartan assembly when the allies had departed. As a whole, these speeches illuminate not so much the recent course of events, as the state of mind resulting from them. By so doing, they recreate with amazing vividness the atmosphere out of which the war sprang.

Representatives of other aggrieved states had already spoken, he says, when the Corinthians delivered the speech which he sets down first. It consists, in essence, of a comparison between the Spartan and the Athenian outlook designed to show that the conservatism and imperturbability traditional to Sparta were no longer safe qualities in a world increasingly affected by Athenian dynamism. The picture drawn of the Spartans is that of a long-since satisfied people, solely concerned with the safe keeping of earlier gains and extremely loath to jeopardize their position by any adventure. Thucydides nowhere formally treats the origins of this conservatism. He emphasizes, to be sure, the degree to which fear of

the helots¹⁸ immobilized Sparta but does not explain in detail how she alone of Greek states made early conquests on the mainland of Hellas and thereafter attempted to rule these by force alone. Sparta in many ways resembles Rome but, unlike Rome, lacked the wisdom to allow her subject peoples (whether the helots at home or the conquered peoples of Messenia) some degree of liberty. In consequence, her own nationals lost most of their own liberty, being compelled to sacrifice all else to policing their great inheritance. Hence arose the astounding discipline of the Spartans, but hence also the quietism of their foreign policy which is the subject of this speech. But to the Corinthian speakers and to Thucydides himself, these facts hardly called for explanation. Accordingly, the status of Sparta as a completely, even excessively, satisfied power is simply assumed, and the question posed by the Corinthians is whether any such state is fitted for continued leadership.

Thus the Corinthians begin by recalling how they had warned of Athens' rising strength and how their warnings had constantly been neglected. They attribute this half-willing blindness on Sparta's part to what they call her *ἡσυχία*.¹⁹ Pindar uses the word, which means literally "tranquillity," to connote the poised and dignified way of life that is built on established position,²⁰ and with two other virtually synonymous terms, *σωφροσύνη* and *δικαιοσύνη*, "moderation" and "justice," it has much this same connotation in the *History*. But it had also come

¹⁸ I 132. 4, IV 41. 3, 55. 1, V 14. 3, VII 26. 2, VIII 40. 2.

¹⁹ I 69. 4; cf. 118. 2.

²⁰ *Pyth.* VIII 1, fg. 99 (Bowra).

to signify the oligarchic quietism just mentioned which offered an ever-increasing contrast to the creativity of democratic Athens. It is this difference of outlook between Sparta and Athens (and thus between oligarchy and democracy) that the speakers now develop at some length.

"They are innovators," say the Corinthians, "quick to form and carry out new plans; you, on the other hand, simply keep what you have, without change of ideas, even without adequate effectiveness in the most essential acts. They, moreover, show a daring unjustified by their resources, take risks beyond their best judgment, and remain hopeful in difficulties. It is characteristic of you never to act up to the limit of your power, to doubt even your strongest reasons for confidence, and to think that troubles will never end. They refuse to put off anything, you delay; they are always abroad, you at home. For they think that they will gain something by travel, you that it would endanger what you already have. In victory they press an advantage farthest and fall back least in defeat. Further, they give their persons recklessly for the state, even as they train their minds jealously on its behalf. . . . To these ends they toil surrounded by dangers and difficulties all their life, with little enjoyment of what they have because they are always getting more. They know no other holiday than duty and find leisure (*ἡσυχία*) as calamitous as the most taxing work. In short, if one said that they were born neither to enjoy leisure themselves nor to permit it to others, he would be telling the simple truth."²¹ With

²¹ I 70. 2-9.

this bitter comparison, the Corinthians draw to an end. They urge Sparta to effective action before it is too late and warn that, if she hesitates, they will seek new allies. They conclude by claiming that since Athens had long been an aggressor, the Peloponnesian League would not violate the Thirty Years' Peace by declaring war.

The speech is overdrawn, as no doubt the original was. Sparta was not so sunk in her way of life as to be incapable of action; on the contrary, what Thucydides wishes to show in these speeches is that she would and did move when her vital interests were sufficiently touched. Nor was Athens so united as the Corinthians for their own purposes wished to make out. Nevertheless, the essential burden of the speech is most revealing. Nowhere in the *History* does the contemporary impression of Athens as a fiercely progressive, even revolutionary, power emerge more clearly. And if this fact is salutary for us who tend to judge the Periclean age largely by the Parthenon and the plays of Sophocles, it is not less important for Thucydides' whole train of thought in the *History*. For it shows as operative in the present that process of renewal of power which, in the Archaeology, he had read into the past. Athens, by becoming a democracy and a naval state, was leading the way towards a new level of material achievement and political unity in Greece, even as Minos and Agamemnon had done earlier. Her citizens were galvanized into effecting that change, and, whether they wished to or not, the other states had to compete. Power, to Thucydides' mind, was never static. The Spartans, therefore, could not rest on their laurels, however much this

speech shows that they wished to. Some scholars, to be sure, have talked of the speech as if it showed Corinth and not Sparta as the main fomenter of war and might therefore be a relic of an earlier view regarding the causes.²² But such a reading of the speech is mistaken. It merely shows how any settled power (and Sparta peculiarly because of her difficulties at home) is slow to act and may well give the impression of somnolence. But in the last analysis, no such shift of leadership as was then threatening in Greece could pass without a struggle, and the Spartans rose to make that struggle.

Something was said earlier of the next speech. It is that of certain Athenian ambassadors who, Thucydides says, chanced to be in Sparta on other business and who were given the same privilege of addressing the League as had been given the Corinthian ambassadors at Athens during the Corcyrean affair. The speech is a justification of Athenian power on two grounds: because it rested on natural law and because it was moderately used. The parallels previously adduced to the former argument make clear that it represents a well-known point of view in Athens at the time.

Primacy, the ambassadors say, came to their city in the first place both because of its conduct in the Persian Wars and because after Plataea Sparta soon abjured any further effort against the Persians. But, they go on, after Athens had enjoyed leadership for a while, she found herself in the invidious position of forcing the Aegean states, originally willing members of the Delian League, to keep up the war. Presently these states would

²² Ed. Schwartz, *Das Geschichtswerk des Thukydides*, Bonn, 1919¹, 1929².

have gone over to Sparta, by which time, however, not only was Sparta increasingly hostile but the rewards of empire were increasingly attractive. Thus, they say in the passage quoted earlier, it is not surprising that Athens should not surrender her empire. She was not the first to have acquired such a thing, but it had always been the law that the weak should submit to the strong.²³ "Rather," they continue, "we thought ourselves worthy of the position, and in fact seemed so to you until now when you are thinking of your own interests but talking of abstract right, a consideration which never yet turned anyone from his advantage when he was strong enough to obtain it."

After these extremely frank remarks, they turn to their second point. "On the contrary, praise should be given those who, though not so cold to natural promptings as to refuse empire, nevertheless prove themselves more just than their position demanded. We submit that if others had our power they would soon show how moderate we have been, though this very decency of ours, perhaps not unnaturally, has won us more criticism than applause."²⁴ They go on to point out how the number of cases tried in the metropolis had seemed to prove simply the litigiousness of Athenians rather than, as was the case, their desire for justice ("For when a power can enforce, it need not litigate"),²⁵ and again, how the almost complete equality of the allies had not been counted to Athens' credit but merely made any disparity the more galling. Men, they gloomily conclude, seem to accept absolute more easily than partial control.

²³ I 76. 2.

²⁴ I 76. 3-4.

²⁵ I 77. 2.

They end by prophesying that, if Sparta ever displaced Athens, she would be hated even more fiercely because of the austerity of Spartan manners, and by urging that, for these reasons and because of the uncertainty of war, Sparta should think twice before breaking the Thirty Years' Peace.

If the previous speech portrayed Athens as a menace to the old order in Greece, the present speech does so, in a sense, even more markedly. At least, the cold doctrine that the strong always control the weak puts the growth of the empire in a far from friendly light. It might be argued that Thucydides, who was much influenced by such doctrines, merely imputes them to his speakers, but to believe that would be to forget Athens' whole position *vis-à-vis* Sparta. Athens was historically the rising power. If, then, she had accepted all her rival's traditional standards — the standards summed up in the conservative slogans *ἡσυχία*, *δικαιοσύνη*, *σωφροσύνη*, quietude, justice, moderation — she clearly would have lacked any possible justification for change. As it was, the Athenians prided themselves on other qualities: their vigor, their power of using and deserving responsibility, their leadership in a new movement which meant, domestically, the assertion of the middle against the upper classes and, internationally, the assertion of Athens against the oligarchic states. These qualities, which are later discussed at length by both Pericles and Alcibiades,²⁶ were summed up in the term *πολυπραγμοσύνη*, "vigor," "assertiveness," the antithesis of the Spartan *ἡσυχία*. It is revealing that this doctrine of *πολυπραγ-*

²⁶ II 63, 64. 4, VI 18, 87.

μοσύνη is attributed even to Theseus, the legendary founder of Athens, in Euripides' patriotic play the *Suppliants* ²⁷ produced in the late twenties, and, both for that reason and because it was the only doctrine possible to Athens under the circumstances, it seems hardly out of place here. A vein of hardness runs through almost all the Athenian speeches in the *History*, because accepted standards sanctioned the old order.

On the other hand, mere power was not, to the envoys, the empire's sole justification, and, when they go on to emphasize the humanity of Athens, they broach an idea of almost equal importance in the *History*. In the Funeral Oration, ²⁸ Pericles expounds still more strongly the beneficence and restraint of Athenian leadership, but as the war continues, these qualities slowly disappear, until in the Melian Dialogue Athenians are made to express without shame a doctrine of absolute force. The present speech therefore, like the Funeral Oration, was intended to illustrate the milder Athens before the war. Thucydides, as we have repeatedly seen, was not repelled by the idea of power. On the contrary, he saw in it the basis of civilization. But power to him was not all, and an essential element of the great contrast which he was drawing between Athens and Sparta at the outbreak is this moderation which crowns and accompanies the creativity of Athens. Nevertheless, as the envoys bitterly point out, that mildness was forgotten when Sparta, for her own purposes, raised the cry of liberation. At the end of the war Sparta took over sole leadership of Greece, and, when the envoys observe here how

²⁷ Lines 323-325, 576-577.

²⁸ II 40. 4-5.

much more hatred any other state in Athens' position would stir up, their remarks are almost certainly colored by the actual experience of Greece under Lysander. But their words are not out of place even in 432. The memory of Pausanias' arrogance during the Persian Wars was still fresh (Thucydides reverts to it later),²⁹ and several of Euripides' plays in this period echo the impression of Spartan pride and self-interest that is conveyed here.³⁰ This speech, therefore, while developing the picture just drawn by the Corinthians of Athens as an expanding state menacing the existent balance of power, also shows what high claims, as a merciful as well as a modern state, she had to leadership.

These two speeches were no doubt chosen by Thucydides out of several others delivered at the meeting of the League, in order to reveal Sparta's position in relation to Athens and thus to clarify her eventual decision for war. That decision was taken in the Spartan assembly following the meeting of the League, and here also Thucydides records two speeches: a long argument against war by the aged king Archidamus and an extremely terse and bitter exhortation by the ephor Sthenelaidas. In these speakers he may have intended to suggest the long-standing conflict in Sparta between the kings and the elected ephors, and, by emphasizing the age of Archidamus, to illustrate his later remark that it was the young in all states who were most enflamed.³¹ But if either of these effects were intended, they are minor. The debate has only one major purpose,

²⁹ I 95. 1, 180. 2.

³⁰ *Andromache* 445-464; *Suppliants* 187.

³¹ II 8. 1.

to reveal how the Spartans of their own will took the decision for war.

Archidamus' speech is among the most revealing and suggestive in the *History*, but it has two points of special interest. The first is the old king's conviction that Sparta could not win. What gives him pause are Athens' great wealth, the extent of her empire, and her naval and commercial economy.³² He, in fact, speaks of the weakness of land- as opposed to sea-powers in much the way that Thucydides himself does in the *Archaeology*. Thus he concludes that, if Sparta should follow her traditional strategy of invading the enemy's territory with her superior land forces, nothing would be gained. Athens, safe behind her walls, could resist indefinitely, and the war would go on for a generation. This is the first mention of an important line of thought in the *History*. When Pericles in his first speech sets forth his concept of Athenian strategy,³³ he virtually repeats what Archidamus has said here. The great statesman argued that, by surrendering Attica to invasion but meanwhile keeping the empire intact, Athens could not conceivably be defeated. On the contrary, the enemy would soon be exhausted by his futile efforts, the more so because Athens could meanwhile harry and divide the Peloponnesus from the sea. The reasoning behind this strategy is fundamentally economic. Athens, by having built up through her navy a far-flung commercial power, had in Pericles' opinion (which was also that of Thucydides) become invulnerable to the weapons that had formerly won Sparta her position. As Grundy

³² I 80-81.

³³ I 141-142.

observed some years ago,³⁴ the reason why the strategy of invasion had ever been successful — indeed, why the heavily-armed hoplite had been originally evolved to fight in the fertile Greek valleys — was that most Greek cities had been dependent on their local harvests. When therefore Athens had become independent of her harvests, a new era based on a new kind of power had been ushered in. This fact explains 'Thucydides' insistence in the *Archaeology* on the naval and material development of Greece. It also explains Pericles' confidence as he faced the war and the gloom of Archidamus in this speech. To Thucydides, his estimate was correct. Athens, with good leadership, was in a position beyond the reach of her foes and should have won the war easily.

Archidamus therefore urges Sparta to temporize until such a time as she could build up her economy, possibly with foreign (namely, Persian) help. In the meantime, he continues, the strength of Sparta will remain as always in her disciplined way of life. This second major point in his speech is no less fundamental to the *History* than the first. His justification of the Spartan outlook is ostensibly a rebuttal to the criticisms made earlier by the Corinthians, but in the larger design of the work it stands as a counterpoise to the great analysis of Athenian liberalism in the Funeral Oration. The disciplined strength of Sparta, like her economic weakness, was, as we saw, suggested in the *Archaeology*. It is a theme which runs to the end of the work, offering a constant contrast to the political instability which cost Athens the war.

³⁴ *Thucydides and the History of His Age*, pp. 240-252.

The passage in the present speech reads as follows: "Do not be ashamed of the hesitation which they criticize in us. Haste now will mean delay later, since we shall start unprepared. Moreover, our city has remained free and respected through every change, precisely because of this quality of sober prudence (*σωφροσύνη* *ἐμφρων*). By reason of it we neither run riot in success nor yield, as others do, to disaster. When people would flatter us into risks which appear unjustified, pleasure does not move us; nor does anger, when they would sting us on with criticism. Discipline, rather, makes us both courageous and discreet: courageous, because self-control derives largely from a sense of honor, and courage from self-control; discreet, because we are educated too simply to mock our laws and too rigorously to disobey them. We are not bred to that futile intelligence whereby men keenly analyze the enemy's plans in theory but prove inadequate in practice, but we are taught to think his plans much like our own and fortune impenetrable to reason. Thus we prepare ourselves as if every enemy were able and rest our hopes not on his mistakes but on our own careful training. Never believe that human beings differ much from one another, but rather that the strongest man is he that is trained in the harshest school. This is the ideal of discipline (*μελέται*) which our fathers have passed down to us and to which we owe our continued strength. Let us not desert it now." ³⁵

The most striking trait of this argument, and that which stands in strongest contrast to the liberalism set forth by Pericles, is its scorn of reason. When Archi-

³⁵ I 84.

damus says that the strongest man is simply the one trained most rigorously, he leaves no place for any but the moral virtues. It will be remembered, however, that Socrates constantly gave understanding (ἐπιστήμη) as the source of virtue (ἀρετή), and the same serene confidence that thought, so far from impeding right action, is essential to it breathes through the Funeral Oration. Thus the Spartan system regards human nature with suspicion on the ground that it will falter unless schooled to the limit; the Athenian trusts men's ability to seek their full development without losing (rather, thereby greatly enhancing) their powers of action. Thucydides' awareness of this basic difference in attitude more than anything else transforms the contrast which he drew between the two states into a half-abstract contrast between liberalism and authoritarianism, in consequence of which, as the *History* progresses, the actual performance of the two states comes to illustrate in a thousand ways the traits of the two polities as such. On the one side stands a system of free initiative that achieves brilliant results when it does not lead to division and self-interest; on the other, a rigorous control which, though intensely cramping to thought and even to action, produces at least a certain corporate steadiness. The *History* is as dark as it is because the humaner of the two ideals fails in essential respects to fulfil itself.

Thucydides was not alone in grasping this fundamental difference between Athens and Sparta. There are numerous contemporary parallels to the ideas set forth in the Funeral Oration, and, as was remarked earlier, the views expressed here by Archidamus are

strikingly anticipated in Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Antigone*. Menelaus in the former play and Creon in the latter demand unhesitating obedience to the state on the exact grounds expressed here: namely, because, human nature being what it is, stern discipline alone assures bravery in the field.³⁶ Teucer and Antigone, on the other hand, vindicate the right of free private action, and it is interesting that Antigone, like Pericles in the Funeral Oration,³⁷ points to the great unwritten laws as guiding and restraining such action. In the conflict of these characters, the audience was unquestionably meant to feel the deeper conflict between two political outlooks, and the same purpose appears in several other writings of the period. In the debate on constitutions in Herodotus³⁸ oligarchy is pictured as controlled, democracy as unfettered; in Aristophanes' *Clouds*³⁹ the old education signifies the restraint, the new the release of human nature (*φύσις*); in the tract of the Old Oligarch,⁴⁰ the virtue of the rich is in their order and exactitude of life (*ἀκρίβεια*), the viciousness of the poor in their disorderliness (*ἀταξία*). These last examples are all hostile to the free ways fostered by democracy, but they point none the less to widespread discussion of the subject. It may be that Thucydides had little exact knowledge of what was said at the secret Spartan assembly, though Archidamus could certainly have set forth the opinions here attributed to him. In any case, the examples just given

³⁶ *Ajax* 1073-1080, *Antigone* 666-676.

³⁷ II 37. 3. *Antigone* 450-460.

³⁸ III 81.

³⁹ Contrast especially ll. 992 and 1078.

⁴⁰ I 5.

make clear that, in picturing the war as a struggle between two opposed ways of life, Thucydides expressed the view of his contemporaries. To have infinitely broadened that view and lent it a quality of lasting representativeness is one of his highest achievements.

The series of four speeches ends with the masterly short harangue of the ephor Sthenelaidas.⁴¹ Archidamus in the earlier part of his speech had shown convincing reason why Sparta should not fight, at least for the present. He also admitted that she would bear the onus of breaking the Thirty Years' Peace. When, therefore, Thucydides gives in reply not a rational justification of war but simply a violent call to action, he is setting vividly before the reader's eyes what he had called the real cause of the war, namely, Sparta's fear. Thus from his scornful beginning, "The Athenians' many words I do not understand," to his impassioned close, "Vote, Lacedaemonians, worthily of Sparta," Sthenelaidas expresses a bitterness and resentment that have finally reached the cracking-point. Sparta may not possess money and ships, he says, but she at least has allies and will not betray them. The Athenians' justification of the empire, the warnings of Archidamus, mean nothing now. When Sthenelaidas in addition forced a vote which would show exactly who favored and who opposed war — an invidious choice in that hot moment — the decision carried by a large majority. It was reported to the allies, and another meeting was set for its ratification by the entire League. So the Spartans took action, repeats Thucydides, "not so much because they were persuaded

⁴¹ I 86.

by the representations of their allies as because they feared that Athens might grow yet stronger, seeing as they did much of Hellas already under her influence.”⁴² This statement repeats the view of the causes given before, but it has a fuller meaning here. For the process of historical change, suggested in the *Archaeology*, has now been applied concretely to Athens and Sparta, and the latter has been presented as, in defense of her ancient primacy, willing a war to which in mind and equipment she was no longer equal.

It is unnecessary to dwell at length on the rest of the first book. Enough has perhaps been said of Thucydides' attitude towards the growth of Athens and towards the position in which it left Sparta, and in the course of the discussion the substance of the following chapters, which confirm his views on these subjects, has been largely anticipated. With a few further words on the first book we shall therefore pass to the opening period of hostilities described in the second and, in particular, to the Funeral Oration and Pericles' last speech. The speeches so far considered chiefly concerned Sparta. What opinions were expressed of Athens were in the main either hostile, as, for instance, the Corinthians', or defensive, as those of the Athenian envoys. Pericles' great speeches, on the other hand, give a picture of the city which is no less profound and positive than it is friendly. These speeches, therefore, form the natural conclusion of this chapter on Thucydides' initial estimate of the two rivals.

After repeating his view of the causes in the passage

⁴² I 88.

just quoted, he characteristically does not leave the subject at once but goes on to the second of his confirmatory digressions, the previously mentioned Pentecontaëtia or history of the fifty years since Salamis.⁴³ His purpose, as he says,⁴⁴ was in part to correct the faulty chronology of Hellanicus, in part to show the real forces in the growth of Athens. In substance, this painstaking study repeats many of the ideas previously set forth: in particular, the significance of Themistocles as the originator of the navy and founder of the empire, the folly of the Ionians in failing to do their part in the Delian League, the consequent priority which Athens gained by her vigorous action, and the mounting resentment and suspicion which that fact aroused in Sparta. The Pentecontaëtia is, in effect, a continuation of the Archaeology, applying to the recent past the ideas there applied to the remote past. It occupies its present place because, to repeat, it is a digression confirming his views on the causes of the war, as the Archaeology did on its magnitude. The fact is relevant to the problem of the unity of the *History* mentioned in the last chapter. To judge by his method here, one would not expect him to discuss the unity and length of the war in detail until, with the failure of the Peace of Nicias, the subject actually came up. For both these first digressions reveal his practice of inserting even very important material in support of specific statements rather than of prefacing it to the work as a whole. He seems to have adopted this practice (no doubt in part unconsciously) for two main reasons: first, because of his pressing absorption

⁴³ I 89-118.⁴⁴ I 97. 2.

with the forces actually at play in a given period of the narrative, and, second, because, granted he was to give added information, he wished to do so with utmost accuracy. Certainly, the latter desire is strikingly illustrated in the *Pentecontaëtia*, which, if it is designed to support his views on the causes, nevertheless because of its abundant detail stands by itself as a brilliant and, to us, uniquely valuable history of the middle fifth century.

The rest of the first book is chiefly concerned with two matters: the ratification by the League of Sparta's decision for war, and the diplomatic maneuvers carried on during the winter of 432/1. In his account of the second meeting of the League, Thucydides gives another speech by the Corinthians in which they restate the imperative need of checking Athens before it is too late and dwell somewhat acridly on what they call the "folly, cowardice, and sloth" whereby she was allowed to reach her present strength.⁴⁵ These vices they attribute, as before, to Sparta's torpor as a settled power. But the burden of their speech consists in the promise of victory which they find in the superior Peloponnesian man-power, a promise which Pericles flatly refutes in his first speech and which will be considered in that context.

War was forthwith voted, but, instead of breaking off relations with Athens immediately, Sparta first addressed on her a number of demands. The purpose behind these was incidentally to injure Pericles but primarily to cast the onus of the war on Athens if she refused. There may even have been some lingering hope that she would give in. The first demand, about which

⁴⁵ I 122. 4.

Thucydides was most scornful,⁴⁶ was that Athens should banish the Alcmaeonid family, the family of Pericles, because certain of its members, during the conspiracy of Cylon nearly two centuries earlier, had committed the impiety of killing some of the conspirators in a sanctuary. The obvious reply to this, which Athens duly made, was that more recent taints at Sparta called for equal attention, notably that resulting from the execution of Pausanias in the famous bronze temple of Athena. Thucydides here digresses again to explain these charges and, after describing the career of Pausanias, goes on to contrast it with that of Themistocles.⁴⁷ His account serves to amplify what he had said at the start of the Pentecontaëtia about the rise of Athens, to which both men had contributed, the Spartan by an arrogance which alienated Greek sympathy, the Athenian positively by his genius in founding the navy. The pointed comparison that Thucydides draws here suggests that he regarded the two men to some extent as exemplars, *παραδείγματα*, of their respective states. But to return, after their first paltry and disingenuous demand the Spartans went on to make two other demands which were far more serious: that Athens should release Potidaea and Aegina and rescind the Megarean decree, and, finally, that she should liberate all the subject states of the empire. It is in reply to this ultimatum that Pericles makes the first of the three great speeches which lie at the heart of the meaning of the *History*.⁴⁸

Something has already been said of this speech, perhaps the least remarkable of the three, in connection

⁴⁶ I 127. 1.⁴⁷ I 128-138.⁴⁸ I 140-144.

with that of Archidamus. As the Spartan king had foreseen, Pericles was not to be terrified by the now outmoded strategy of invasion, and the plan of war which he sets forth reflects his view of Athens' vastly superior economy. But before expounding this, he deals with the recent ultimatum, which, he says, evinces only Sparta's desire to break Athens. It is contended, he says, that if Athens rescinds the Megarean decree, peace will follow. But this apparently small issue symbolizes the whole great question: whether the city is to consort on terms of equality with Sparta or to keep its possessions in fear and at her bidding. "Equal servitude is implied by any demand, great or small, imposed on a state by its equals without resort to arbitration."⁴⁹ This argument that the war was forced on Athens is unquestionably genuine, since it appears in contemporary sources, notably, Euripides' *Heraclidae*.⁵⁰ Unquestionably, also, Thucydides agreed with it. He found Sparta responsible for the war, not only because she had reached her decision first but because that decision, he thought, represented a final act of will after a half-century of delay. In a weaker moment at the time of the Thirty Years' Peace, she had recognized Athens' sphere of influence as equal to her own, but now repented of that step. Pericles could therefore represent Athens as fighting, not for conquest, but merely to keep the status which had been hers for fifteen years. This attitude determines the rest of the speech — indeed, in a sense, the rest of the *History*.

Pericles accordingly goes on to say that Athens should

⁴⁹ I 141. 1.

⁵⁰ Lines 197-201.

accept war and to predict victory on the basis of her superior resources. This part of his speech shows an almost verbal correspondence to the previously mentioned speech of the Corinthians at the second council at Sparta. Pericles no doubt knew the hopes of the other side, and there is no basic falsity in his refuting them here. Nevertheless, the exactness of the parallel well illustrates Thucydides' method, ingrained in the fibre of his thought, of achieving clarity by contrast. In brief, Pericles admits the enemy's superior man-power but suggests three ways in which it will be nullified. First, the Peloponnesian troops consist largely of small farmers, unable and unwilling to stay long from home. Then, the organization of a league is clumsy, and the difference of interest between the several states will lead to further inefficiency. Finally, as land-powers, the Peloponnesians are incomparably poorer than Athens. For all these reasons, he concludes, the enemy will be unable to stand a long war or to create a navy which alone could jeopardize Athens' resources. And this prediction leads Pericles to the plan of war which in turn confirms his view that the struggle had been forced on Athens and was purely defensive. It consists in allowing the enemy to invade Attica unchecked while the Athenians gathered behind the city walls and the navy meanwhile ravaged the Peloponnesus. The purpose behind the plan was to exhaust the enemy and to conserve man-power for the more important task of protecting the empire. The Athenians would be more fortunate, Pericles says, if they were islanders. As it is, they must not be angered into fighting the far stronger Peloponnesian armies, nor

heed the loss of houses and land but of lives. "Men own property," he adds, "not property men. If I had thought that I could persuade you, I should have urged your going out and burning the country in order to show the Peloponnesians that you will not submit for its sake." Then he concludes in words prophetic of the whole later narrative, "There are many other grounds on which I hold out hopes of victory, if you only do not try to increase the empire during the course of the war and of your own will take on added risks. It is our own mistakes that I fear, not the plans of the enemy."⁵¹

The speech could stand as a summary of Thucydides' thought in the whole first book. The picture that Pericles gives is of a brilliant material development which stood safe from anything that the Peloponnesians, now thoroughly outstripped, could bring against it. His plan of war follows as a simple corollary from that same development based on commerce and control of the seas, the larger significance of which Thucydides had expounded in the *Archaeology*. Again, the view stated here that the war was forced upon Athens coincides with Thucydides' earlier account of the causes and, not less, with his description of the council at Sparta. Resentful of their decline but not fully aware how weak they were, the Spartans had taken a step which should have cost them enormously, had Athens been properly led. That conclusion in turn explains Pericles' closing remarks that he feared Athens' own errors more than the power of the enemy. The rest of the *History* is to confirm this prophecy, already hinted at both in the *Archaeology*

⁵¹ I 143. 5-144. 1.

and in Archidamus' estimate of Sparta's superior steadiness. The speech, then, shows as an accomplished fact that shift of power from Sparta to Athens which was the basic cause of the war and which Thucydides has now analyzed from many sides.

Perhaps it was not quite correct to call the speech, as was just done, a summary of his whole thought in the first book. It concerns rather the strictly material side of Athens' power, a matter further clarified in the next book in a speech by Pericles reported in indirect discourse, giving a detailed account of the city's resources.⁵² (The Athenians, as W. S. Ferguson once observed, tried, unlike ourselves, to finance their wars in advance.) But two further elements in Athens' strength were touched on earlier by the Athenian envoys, her humane democracy and her creative will to power. These subjects form the themes respectively of the Funeral Oration and Pericles' third speech, which accordingly complete Thucydides' appraisal of his native city at the start of the war.

The Funeral Oration was delivered late in 431 at the end of the first year of war, a year which had brought the expected Spartan invasion and which had seen the residents of Attica retiring, according to plan, behind the city walls. Thucydides notes the intense excitement as well as the general inclination towards Sparta which obtained throughout neutral Greece.⁵³ In Homer's formal manner, which Herodotus had copied, he also appends a list of the numerous states, members of the Peloponnesian and Delian leagues, which were engaged

⁵² II 13.

⁵³ II 8.

on either side. Hostilities had begun as early as February when the Thebans supported an abortive *coup d'état* in Plataea, the small but famous city on the Boeotian border that had long been allied with Athens. This dramatic event greatly interested Thucydides and called forth one of his finest descriptions, but it may better be taken up in connection with the long and bitter siege to which it led. Because of a delay which was ascribed to Archidamus' distaste for the war and for which he was much criticized, the invasion was not severe. Nevertheless, there resulted even now a vast dislocation in Attica which Thucydides emphasizes by an interesting digression on the older ways of country life prevalent before the war.⁵⁴ Athens countered by raiding the Peloponnese and taking over certain of Corinth's dependencies in northwest Greece. She also dispersed the Dorian residents of Aegina, and at the end of the year invaded Megara.

The Funeral Oration was delivered after the close of this indecisive season at a ceremony when the ashes of the fallen were given public burial. The purpose of any such speech must be to convey the reason for such a sacrifice, and in its fulfilment of that purpose the Funeral Oration would seem to have no equal unless it be the Gettysburg Address. Certainly it stands far above the several similar orations that have come down from antiquity. Like the two other speeches of Pericles recorded in the *History*, it clearly reflects the mind which Thucydides knew and which greatly influenced him, a mind marked by a certain coolness and even disillusion

⁵⁴ II 14-16.

in its view of ordinary human motives but of supreme lucidity in its grasp of higher goals and of passionate belief in them. The chiselled sentences of the oration may well contain some of Pericles' phrases, for which he was famous. Contemporary parallels to the ideas expressed in the speech are particularly numerous.⁵⁵ But the main reason for believing in its essential fidelity of tone and even of expression is the deep imprint which the man himself made on the historian.

The speech is, in the main, an analysis of democracy as a form of government. That analysis is as searching as it is because Pericles pauses only briefly on the historical achievements of Athens or even on the actual democratic practices in force there⁵⁶ — majority rule, freedom of speech, equality of opportunity, equality before the law — but passes almost at once to the effect of these practices on the public mind. Thus he rests his claims for democracy on what has come to be recognized as its principal sanction, its educative value to the human spirit rather than its mere efficiency as a form of government. Or, to put the matter in another way, he presents democracy as a force which sets in motion a multitude of lesser forces, namely the lives of individual citizens, and shows how these in turn endow the democratic state with funds of self-directed energy unknown under other constitutions.

The first effect of democracy which he mentions is tolerance. "We do not begrudge people doing what they wish," he says in a delightful sentence, "nor even show

⁵⁵ Cf. *Harv. Stud. in Class. Philology* 49 (1938), pp. 40-43.

⁵⁶ II 37. 1.

on our faces a sour, if harmless, disapproval.”⁵⁷ But this freedom, he adds, is checked by a voluntary respect for the law and notably for the unwritten laws. The point is doubly interesting since, as was remarked earlier, Antigone in Sophocles’ play defends her liberty on the same grounds. Oligarchy, as it was described by Archidamus and by Creon in the play, hedges the citizen’s human frailty with a multitude of restraints. Evidently, in justifying freedom, the advocates of democracy commonly argued, as here, that precisely by stripping men of petty controls, it left them more simply responsive to the great natural sanctions of morality. Certainly, at least, this trust in human nature which Pericles expresses forms the ultimate difference between Athens and Sparta and thus between democracy and oligarchy.

He goes on to reveal the many other elements contributing to the fulness of life in Athens: public celebrations (for instance, the tragic and comic performances) and graceful private houses, “the charm of which drives dullness off”; goods from all the world that were to be had in Athenian markets; free association with the foreigners that flocked to the city. These opportunities, which are the fruit of individual energy, do not lessen, he claims, but rather increase the courage of Athenians. “If then,” he goes on, emphasizing the contrast to Sparta, “with light hearts rather than through heavy discipline, less by force of law than out of native courage, we willingly undergo dangers, ours is the gain that we do not faint beforehand at ills to come but, being in

⁵⁷ II 37. 2.

them, prove ourselves no less brave than those who forever train.”⁵⁸ This confident belief that privilege evokes a corresponding sense of responsibility he sums up in words unmatched in the *History*, φιλοκαλοῦμέν τε γὰρ μετ’ εὐτελείας καὶ φιλοσοφοῦμεν ἄνευ μαλακίας, “we love beauty with simplicity, we pursue wisdom without softness.”⁵⁹ The phrase μετ’ εὐτελείας, “with simplicity,” means that beauty does not depend on monetary value and can be available to all. The words ἄνευ μαλακίας, “without softness,” express his faith that inquiry does not spoil men for action. The restrained grace and measured optimism of the Greek spirit at its best could not be more fitly described. He concludes this part of his speech by saying that not poverty but the failure to struggle against it is considered disgraceful in Athens, and, again, that all are expected to share in the city’s administration, those who refuse being considered not gentlemen of leisure (the oligarchic ideal) but useless.

So far Pericles has shown how democracy, by its trust of the individual citizen, had evoked an energy and imagination which were in turn the cause of Athens’ brilliant rise. No doubt the picture is ideal. The contemporary Old Oligarch represents democracy as having brought a decline of all standards, a surrender of all decencies to the gross self-interest of the poor. No doubt also the widespread privileges of which Pericles speaks were dependent to some degree both on the empire and on the trade of an expanding era. Nevertheless, the fact remains that it was democracy which had endowed Athens with many times more citizens willing and able

⁵⁸ II 39. 4.⁵⁹ II 40. 1.

to venture self-reliantly on new enterprises than were possessed by any other Greek state. In that fact is to be found the ultimate cause of the city's great material advance that Thucydides had emphasized, of the optimistic spirit of progress which he himself had felt in his youth, and of the enormous advantage with which he pictures Athens as entering the war. Democracy, as he knew it, was the dynamic force which had carried Athens to a stage of civilization unknown before.

Pericles continues his description of the Athenian outlook by mentioning two beliefs which are in effect the principles underlying all that he had said. "All of us," he claims, "can either initiate policy or at least judge it intelligently. Debate in our opinion is not harmful to action. What is harmful, on the contrary, is failure to discuss a matter thoroughly before carrying it out."⁶⁰ That all citizens can and should share in the making of policy and that free public debate is essential are of course the basic tenets of democracy, and it is significant that in the debate in Euripides' *Suppliants*⁶¹ the oligarchic speaker attacks exactly these two points. Pericles is therefore expressing not Thucydides' later insight but views known and held at the time. His words convey a certain Jeffersonian intellectuality, as of the theorist analyzing the basis of democracy in the early stages of its development. He goes on, in a passage mentioned earlier, to speak of the empire. "We make our friends, not by receiving, but by conferring benefits . . . and give support, not from calculations of advantage, but freely out of trust in men's native decency."⁶² The

⁶⁰ II 40. 2.⁶¹ Lines 409-425.⁶² II 40. 4-5.

envoys at Sparta had spoken similarly of Athens' mild imperialism, and, however far from ideal it may have been, still as compared, for instance, with Sparta's treatment of Messenia, it represents a vast advance which in this context further illustrates the humane character of democracy. This ideal of full and rounded humanity Pericles sums up in a famous sentence. "In a word, I say that our city as a whole is the education of Hellas and that Athenians as individuals would seem to me supremely fitted to meet the varied circumstances of life with grace and self-reliance."⁶³ Again, it is to the individual that he returns, the man liberated by democracy to a fuller consciousness of his own powers and inspired by it to their effective use. He concludes, in the spirit of the *Archaeology*, by praising Athens' achievements as beyond those sung by earlier poets, and by urging the relatives of the fallen to find comfort in the greatness of the city. "In the knowledge that your happiness is your freedom and your freedom your courage, do not shirk," he says, "the dangers of war."⁶⁴ Formally the words recall those of Archidamus, "we are courageous because self-control derives from a sense of honor and courage from self-control,"⁶⁵ but the underlying ideas could hardly be more opposed. The Spartan king had described an essentially negative, limiting discipline; Pericles holds up the positive hope of a fuller and more humane freedom.

The Funeral Oration, then, sets forth one great cause and one justification of Athens' brilliant rise, her liberating constitution. But from the first Thucydides had

⁶³ II 41. 1.⁶⁴ II 43. 4.⁶⁵ I 84. 3.

emphasized another and equal element in her success, the Athenian will to power, which reaches its fullest expression in Pericles' last speech. That speech, therefore, completes the great analysis of the two states at the start of the war.

Thucydides begins the year 430 with his famous account of the plague, the horror of which is much enhanced by its position just following the Funeral Oration. In these juxtaposed pictures of triumphant art and pitiful helplessness, modern readers may even find a symbol of a whole civilization which goes beyond anything that the author could have intended. As an influence in the decline of Athens, the plague will be considered in the next chapter. It is necessary to note here simply that, in combination with a second more severe Spartan invasion in the same spring, it temporarily broke the people's spirit. They went so far as to make overtures for peace and, when these were rejected, vented their anger on Pericles by expelling him from office. The present speech was delivered by him in his own defense just before this step was taken and constitutes the more searching record of his policy because it was thus made under pressure. With the Funeral Oration, it sums up Thucydides' estimate of Athens in the great age.

Pericles begins by attacking the ruinous spirit of disunion in the city, and in self-defense makes the characterization of himself that was spoken of in the last chapter, as one who was able to see and expound "what

was called for," τὰ δέοντα, who was patriotic and above money.⁶⁶ This passage is important for Thucydides' judgment of Pericles' successors, which is also his judgment of why Athens lost the war, and will come up again later. After asserting his unshaken confidence in the rightness of his policy, Pericles comes to the heart of his speech in what he has to say of Athenian naval power. His words here echo the prediction of victory that he had made in his first speech but go even further. He had purposely, he says, never encouraged the Athenians to consider the full magnitude of their power and would not do so now except to shake them out of their dejection. "You think," he says, "that you control only your empire. But I tell you that of the two realms available for men's use, the earth and the sea, you control the one absolutely . . . for any purpose that you may wish. No existent power, neither the Persian king himself nor any other nation, can withstand you if you put to sea with the forces which you command at present."⁶⁷ Attica in comparison, he goes on, is only "a flower garden, a thing to deck and adorn prosperity," and Athenians may therefore smile at the temporary loss of farms and fields, in the sure knowledge that the enemy can touch them at no vital point whatsoever.

Here is the full statement of Athens' power, a statement that presents Athens as not only far stronger than any actual opponent but destined to a greater future still. Nor is there any doubt that this was also the judgment of Thucydides, since, in praising the foresight of

⁶⁶ II 60. 5.

⁶⁷ II 62. 2.

Pericles, he later says that even the Sicilian expedition was not in itself a mistake; the mistake was in the political quarrels at home which destroyed its efficiency.⁶⁸ Accordingly one sees here, more clearly than ever before, the process of Thucydides' mind and the scheme of his work. Convinced that Pericles' estimate of Athens was correct, he sought an explanation of her power in the distant past and satisfied himself that naval strength had always been the key to dominion and progress in Greece. He saw that Themistocles and Pericles had reapplied the ancient secret of Minos and Agamemnon, until Athens now, strengthened also by those democratic ways which vastly enhanced the resource of her people, had emerged as a power of a quite different order of magnitude from any of the old-fashioned, though still admired, Greek states. And this strength of Athens, eliciting as it had the material progress which he considered the glory of the age, seemed to him, in a sense, its own justification. Nevertheless, the guarded way in which Pericles here speaks of empire is significant. When he says that he had intentionally concealed their real strength from the people, he is repeating the warning which he had made in his first speech against attempting new conquests during the course of the war. He is also reasserting that moderation and sense of responsibility towards the empire which were spoken of both in the Funeral Oration and in the speech of the envoys at Sparta. When, therefore, the later narrative shows Athens striving more and more for absolute dominion, one must recognize that the Periclean ideal has

⁶⁸ II 65. 11.

vanished. For that the ultimate fact of power could not be avoided and was not by Pericles, this speech shows. But that power alone did not constitute the greatness of Athens, either in his eyes or in those of the historian, is equally clear.

Finally, then, Pericles rises to an almost abstract disquisition on the nature of power, a kind of valedictory in which he expounds the harsh, inevitable commitments that attend any great achievement. He is still rebuking those who murmured at their losses in Attica, the richer elements in the city who would have been glad to protect their position and their property even at the cost of submission. But, he replies, the advantages of empire cannot be had without its toils. "Do not think that what you are resisting is merely submission as opposed to freedom; you are fighting against loss of the empire and all the dangerous hatreds that it has incurred. Nor can you retire from it now, even though in terror some of you would play the rôle of righteousness and quiescence. Your empire is, so to speak, a tyranny: to have assumed it, men think, was wrong, but to let it go is perilous. Such advisers, if they gained a following, would ruin any state, even one planted apart and alone. For quiescence cannot survive without the will to do, nor does innocuous submission befit an imperial but a servile state." ⁶⁹ But, he continues, even if the Athenians are some day defeated, they will be famous for having held the most power of any Greek people, ruled the widest empire, and created the richest and greatest city. "And though the quietist may reproach these achievements,

⁶⁹ II 63. 2-3.

they will be emulated by him who again feels the will to do and envied by those who cannot attain them.”⁷⁰

This extraordinary passage sets forth the full implications of the doctrine of *πολυπραγμοσύνη*, the doctrine that the capacity and the will to do forever cause and justify change. This doctrine, as we saw, denied the sanctity of the *status quo* as summed up in the Spartan slogan of *ἡσυχία*, and it is extended in this speech to classes within Athens itself, since Pericles is attacking those conservatives who would have saved their property by submission. To Thucydides, this will to do, which is thus identified with Athenian democracy, undoubtedly seemed fundamental to history. As the Archaeology pictured a succession of states growing to power in the past, so Pericles can imagine that Athens too may someday be succeeded by another dominating state, and Thucydides himself can say that his *History* will be valuable to those who in their own times face new but similar circumstances. As something natural and thus permanent to human experience, this effort to grow and create in a sense transcends ordinary morality. Thus Pericles can speak of the empire as a tyranny and can find its justification in the mere objective fact of achievement. But the desire for power, obvious in the case of a rising state like Athens, was no less real, though less apparent, in an established state like Sparta. The rest of the *History* will bear out the judgment made in connection with the causes of the war, that Sparta, however much she spoke of leading a war of liberation, was in fact as much moved as Athens by considerations of pure expediency,

⁷⁰ II 64, 4.

perhaps more so, because her outlook was narrower and less humane. Thucydides has therefore pictured the struggle between the two states as an episode in a perpetual struggle springing from within men to achieve political order. Athens was striving to impose on Greece a new social pattern, Sparta to perpetuate an old one. Athens to him was infinitely the superior, not only in her liberated vigor but in the material and spiritual achievements which that vigor had called forth.



CHAPTER V

TO THE PEACE OF NICIAS

PERICLES died of the plague in the autumn of 429, over a year after his last reported speech. But with characteristic neglect of all matters lacking military or political importance, Thucydides fails to describe — much less, to dwell on — his death but passes at once to that estimate of his character and policy which marks the transition to a new stage of the narrative. The initial contrast between Athens and Sparta is now complete, and Thucydides has sketched from many sides the former's revolutionary growth and the overwhelming advantage with which she embarked on her struggle against the older order of the Greek world. With the estimate of Pericles,¹ however, he expressly looks ahead, contrasting the great statesman to his successors and describing the bitter political rivalries which, as time went on, were to cancel Athens' superiority. Here, then, clearly appears what can be called the second dominant idea of the *History*, the political weakness of democratic Athens. In this weakness the historian discovered the prime cause of her defeat, and its deepening operation provides the guiding theme of the narrative from now on. Thus, as one considers the *History* as a whole, it

¹ II 65.

seems to fall into two divisions of equal importance but unequal length. In the one, Thucydides expounds the greatness of Athenian democracy, its significance for progress, its historical justification; in the other, he emphasizes that profoundest of democratic problems, the problem of unity and leadership, for which no answer was found after the death of Pericles. A sense of liberation and confidence in the human mind marks the first division, a tone of despair and tragedy the second, and both together undoubtedly reflect the two main stages in the life of Thucydides himself. Primarily, then, because the part of the *History* which has been treated up to now has an intellectual significance balancing and matching the rest but also because many lines of Thucydides' thought, being now familiar, need no longer be discussed in detail, we may henceforth proceed more quickly. The present chapter will follow the *History* to the Peace of Nicias and the next to the end. If such a treatment be felt to involve a major disproportion, it can only be replied that the *History* would not have the significance for us that it has, if the account of Athens' failure did not follow so searching an analysis of her greatness — if, in short, the concepts of greatness and failure did not form the dominant and, as it were, antipodal ideas of the work.

The one weakness of Pericles' defensive strategy was the sacrifice which it demanded of all Athenians, particularly of the country people, and the plague vastly heightened their miseries. It is ironic that, with all his confidence in the calculability of things, Thucydides could never have understood to what a degree the plague

was simply a consequence of the plan of war which demanded herding the people of Attica behind the city walls. Though Pericles was returned to office a few months before his death, the fact that he had been deposed as early as the second year of the war shows the disunion that already existed in Athens. The results of this disunion form the subject of the aforementioned comparison of Pericles with his successors, but, since the matter comes up in a slightly different way in the account of the plague, a few words may first be said of that.

After describing the symptoms of the disease in the Hippocratic manner discussed earlier, he goes on to note its social consequences.² His express method in describ-

² II 52-54. The plague has been variously identified as bubonic, typhus, and smallpox, against all of which there appear to be objections. Cf. Classen-Steup on II 49. 1. Dr. Hans Zinsser rules out the first two of these diseases, though not the third (*Rats, Lice, and History*, Boston, 1935, pp. 120-127. For further discussion, cf. G. Sarton, *Introduction to the History of Science*, Washington, 1927, I, 107). In the opinion of Dr. R. M. Green of the Harvard Medical School, confirmed by Dr. Zinsser (p. 122), the problem of identification derives in large part from the changing character of diseases over long periods of time.

A radically different identification was made to the author by Mr. Stephen Madey of the Harvard Medical School who has kindly interested himself in the problem: namely, that the so-called plague was not an infectious disease but ergotism, which is a severe poisoning induced by a fungus growth (*claviceps purpurea*) on rye and certain related grasses. This suggestion was previously made by R. Kobert, "Zur Geschichte des Mutterkorns," Halle, 1889, pp. 1-47, cited on II 51. 6 in the Boehme-Widmann edition of Thucydides. Dr. George Barger, the most recent authority, appears not to favor this identification (*Ergot and Ergotism*, London, 1931, p. 42). Nevertheless, the symptoms given by Thucydides (II 49) are at least very similar to those noted by Dr. Barger (p. 21): livid color of skin, praecordial anguish, vomiting, feeling of intense heat, formation of vesicles, severe diarrhoea, some impairment of mental functions, loss of extremities. Accounts of the widespread ravages of ergotism, known as *ignis sacer* or St. Anthony's fire, in the Middle Ages are further given by Dr. Barger (pp.

ing the disease was to set down the typical symptoms which would enable any reader to recognize its reappearance, and the same method is to be seen in what he says of its results. This prognostic purpose underlies the *History* as a whole and, as we saw, gives reason for believing that his historical ideals were partly shaped by contemporary medical theory. Now in the later account of the revolution at Corcyra, he not only says that he is describing phenomena which will always recur under similar conditions but specifically notes that, as the war advanced, the phenomena did recur throughout the Greek world.³ In other words, it is his method to state the general character of an event at its first appearance and thereafter to assume it as the underlying con-

43-84), and it is interesting that in one account (p. 51), as in that of Thucydides, the victims are said either to have died within seven days or to have recovered, often with loss of limbs. The chief difficulty of the identification is that, so far as is known, rye was not used for bread in the Mediterranean region throughout antiquity. Known to Pliny as *secale* (*Natur. Hist.* XVIII 40) and to Galen as *βρίζα* (*de Aliment. Facult.* 1. 13, Kühn VI p. 514), it was associated by these authors respectively with the Alpine slopes of the Po valley and with Thrace. On the other hand, Thucydides specifically notes (II 58. 2) that the Athenian army in the Thraceward region became infected. If ergotism was the cause, one would have to assume that, in order to replace the stocks burnt by the Spartans during the first two invasions and to supply both the army and the crowds of refugees in the city, the Athenians imported very heavy supplies of grain from the north and that these contained ergotized rye. It should be added that Thucydides himself considered the disease infectious (II 51. 5, 58. 2). In general, the theory of ergotism must rest almost wholly on the close similarity of the symptoms to those described by Thucydides, since other circumstances do not favor the identification. (For the provenance and early use of rye, cf. V. Hehn, *Kulturpflanzen und Haustierte in ihrem Ubergang aus Asien nach Griechenland und Italien sowie in das übrige Europa*, ed. by O. Schrader, 7th ed., Berlin, 1912, pp. 551-554, also J. Hoops, *Waldbäume und Kulturpflanzen im germanischen Altertum*, Strassburg, 1905, pp. 443-453.)

³ III 82. 2-3.

dition of his narrative. The same applies to the plague, which, described under the year 430, continued through the next year and broke out again in 427.⁴ The state of mind set forth in the following sentences is therefore of importance for events to come. "In other respects also," he says, "the plague was the first occasion of increasing license in the city. People more easily dared now to do for pleasure what they had formerly concealed, seeing how abrupt a change overtook those who had been rich and now suddenly died, and those who had had nothing and straightway possessed the former's wealth. Regarding life and substance as equally ephemeral, men therefore saw fit to reap immediate pleasures. No one was inclined to work for any generally accepted goal, since there was no certainty that he would survive to reach it. . . . Fear of the gods or human law provided no restraint; for it seemed immaterial whether one observe or neglect the former when people were dying indiscriminately, and, as for the latter, no one thought that he would survive to the day of trial — but that a far heavier sentence overhung him as it was, and before it fell he might reasonably enjoy life a little."⁵

With this statement one may compare the underlying reason given in the chapter on revolutions for the decline of standards in wartime: "In peace and prosperity, both states and individuals are actuated by better motives because they are not subject to undesired compulsions. But war, by removing the ease of daily life, is a teacher of violence and lowers the mood of the masses to the level of contemporary circumstances."⁶ Both passages set

⁴ III 87.⁵ II 53.⁶ III 82. 2.

forth the same essential idea, that any violent overturn of ordinary habits destroys the standards based on those habits. The result is *ἀνομία*, lawlessness, the word used in the first sentence of the former passage and underlying the whole description from which the latter is taken. Essentially the same term is later used⁷ of Alcibiades' conduct, which, by rousing the suspicion of the demos, cost him his generalship at Syracuse and Athens her victory. It is apparent, then, that in his account of the plague Thucydides sets forth for the first time those forces of instability and violence which were soon to reveal themselves in the conduct of leaders and people alike. He later says that by 427 the plague had carried off some forty-four hundred hoplites, which have been estimated as almost a third of the original force,⁸ and, if the same average obtained generally, it represents a stupendous loss. Certainly that loss by itself fully explains why, through these first years, Pericles' promise of a quick victory appeared far from justified. But by emphasizing the social even more than the physical effects of the plague, Thucydides suggests that to his mind the worst damage that it caused was to Athenian politics. The passages just cited show that he regarded it as intensifying a public disturbance which was in any case inevitable — particularly in view of Pericles' strategy — in wartime, and under a democratic government that disturbance was bound to have redoubled effect.

The comparison of Pericles with his successors has a

⁷ *Παρανομία*, VI 15. 4.

⁸ III 87. *Cambr. Anc. Hist.* V 201.

slightly different emphasis, being concerned not with the underlying social disorder but with the concrete mistakes to which it led. After describing how Pericles was fined and deposed, the historian goes on to say that the people presently elected him general again, "because they thought him most able to fulfil the needs of the state as a whole."⁹ The phrase *ξύμπασα πόλις*, the state as a whole, later used by Alcibiades to describe the object of all Alcmaeonid policy, in many ways gives the key to what follows. The Old Oligarch, it will be recalled, assumes that no government can be to the interest of the entire people and that democracy is therefore a tyranny by the masses — a view rejected in the Funeral Oration, which pictures Athenian government as a voluntary, intelligent, and profitable association of all the people. But etymologically the word *δημοκρατία* could have two connotations: either the rule of the people as a whole in contrast to an aristocratic few (as in the Funeral Oration) or the actual domination of the demos strictly conceived as the poorer classes (as in the tract of the Old Oligarch). Aristotle makes the same distinction,¹⁰ which evidently goes back to the fifth century, and in light of it Pericles appears in the present passage as the moderating guide of a united democracy, in contrast to his successors who are factional leaders.

The reason why he could be so regarded appears in the body of the passage. "While he was at the head of the state during peace, he guided it moderately and saw that it was firmly protected, and it reached its height

⁹ II 65. 4.

¹⁰ *Politics* VI (IV), 1291b 31, 1293a 9.

under him. Likewise when war broke out, he clearly estimated its strength. He survived the war by two years and six months, and after his death his foresight became even more evident. For he promised victory if the Athenians bided their time, kept up the navy, did not augment the empire during the war, and in no way jeopardized the state. They, however, did the opposite of what he had advised, letting private ambitions and private interests lead them (to their own harm and that of their allies) into projects apparently unconnected with the war which, when successful, brought honor and profit primarily to individuals but, when unsuccessful, impaired the fighting power of the state. The reason was that his position, intelligence, and known probity enabled him to restrain the people without limiting their freedom. He led them rather than they him, because, not drawing his power from illicit sources, he had no need to flatter; on the contrary, the respect in which he was held allowed him even to rebuke the people angrily. When, for example, he saw them unduly and unseasonably confident, he would reduce them to a state of alarm, and when again they were discouraged without reason, he would restore their confidence. The government was nominally a democracy but actually the rule of the first citizen.”¹¹

The words summarize the policies and attitudes expressed in all of Pericles' speeches, also his estimate of himself as one who was able to see and expound “what was called for,” who was patriotic and above money. Such a man, Thucydides thought, could preserve the

¹¹ II 65. 5-10.

virtues of a democracy without incurring its dangers. So much is apparent from the words κατέλχε τὸ πλῆθος ἐλευθέρως, "he restrained the people without limiting their freedom," which convey not only Pericles' qualities of effective leadership but the advantages of freedom that would have been forfeited had that leadership been absolute. Hence the famous concluding sentence, "The government was nominally a democracy but actually the rule of the first citizen," should not be interpreted too strictly. There was nothing unconstitutional in Pericles' position. The historian is merely commenting in admiration on the way in which he gave to Athens that unity and direction without which her expansive vigor would have gone for nothing. Doubtless in retrospect he oversimplifies. Thus, in noting Pericles' moderation, he neglects the radicalism of his youth, and in emphasizing the safety which he gave Athens fails to mention his dangerous policy of conquest preceding the Peace of 445. He would perhaps have replied that what was appropriate at one stage of the city's development was not at another. In any case, his mind is on the period of the present war, and in that period Pericles advocated a unity and restraint which would safeguard Athens' great resources for future use.

The passage ends as follows. "But his successors, being more on a level with one another and each struggling for first place, took to courting the demos by resigning all direction to it. This produced many mistakes (many, that is, for a great and imperial state) and notably the Sicilian expedition, though that was not so much a mistake in the sense that the people miscalculated the

power of their opponents, as that those at home failed to take the right measures in support of those in the field. Absorbed rather with an acrimonious quarrel over the leadership of the demos, they not only blunted the force of the expedition but for the first time fell into civil disorder among themselves. Yet though most of the fleet and all that went to make it up was lost in Sicily and though revolution had now broken out at home, they nevertheless were able to hold out for eight *¹² years against the original enemy augmented by the Sicilians, as well as against the majority of their own allies, which by then had revolted, and against Cyrus the King's son, who later joined the enemy, providing the Peloponnesians with money for a fleet. Nor did they succumb until they were broken by their own internal discords. Such abundant justification did Pericles have at the start when he prophesied an easy victory over the Peloponnesians alone."¹³

Here Thucydides definitely looks ahead, as he later does in a few other digressions, and his words foreshadow the whole following narrative. It has been noted that he regarded Pericles as the leader of the entire people, as opposed to his successors, who were factional leaders. Now he later observes that desire for conquest was characteristic of the masses. He remarks, for instance, that they favored the Sicilian expedition, hoping for large further gains "from which a perpetual source of public employment" would accrue to them.¹⁴ The same assump-

¹² The MSS give "three," a seemingly impossible reading. Cf. Classen-Steup, *ad loc.*

¹³ II 65. 10-13.

¹⁴ VI 24. 3.

tion that all populists were expansionists appears over and over again in Aristophanes.¹⁵ Hence it is evident that, in attacking the later leaders in this passage, he is primarily attacking the extreme democrats who rose to power by advocating a war of conquest and who thus consciously foresook Pericles' initial view of the war. That is what is meant by the statement, "They took to courting the demos by resigning all direction to it." The following narrative will therefore show how Athens, instead of using her immense advantage to obtain the measured victory that could have been hers, lost everything in the hope of a vastly greater victory. To Thucydides, those responsible for this terrible mistake were the aforementioned leaders who rose to power through a policy of expansion but also, since those leaders merely reflected the popular will, the Athenian masses themselves. In addition, the mere political jockeying of small figures proved an immense loss to Athens. Here, then, appears the great dilemma about which the whole *History* centers: how Athens could have used the strength which she owed to her liberating constitution and at the same time have avoided the extremes to which it was prone, doubly so under the strain of the plague and the continuing war.

Because of the plague, the events of this second season of war and of the following season were not notable. The end of the year 430 saw the final surrender of Potidaea, and it is suggestive of the growing bitterness in Athens that the assembly found the terms of capitulation too generous.¹⁶ In 429 the Peloponnesians re-

¹⁵ Esp. *Knights* 174, 1303; *Peace* 250.

¹⁶ II 70. 4.

frained from invading Attica through fear of the plague, beginning instead the elaborate siege of Plataea which was to continue for two terrible years. Their further attempt in the same season to transport an expeditionary force across the Corinthian Gulf for service in northwest Greece was checked by the brilliant performance of the Athenian admiral Phormio, which Thucydides dwells on at some length. In so doing, he introduces a recurrent motif of the *History* which is worth noting. After describing how, with his twenty fast ships, Phormio surrounded the forty-seven Peloponnesian transports, sank several, captured twelve others and forced the rest to put back, he goes on to note the effect on the Peloponnesians in the following words. "The surprising character (*παράλογος*) of this result was overwhelming to them, the more so because this was the first time that they had ventured on an engagement at sea. They therefore supposed that their navy was not to that extent inferior but that there had been cowardice somewhere, failing as they did to contrast the Athenians's long experience (*ἐμπειρία*) with their own brief practice."¹⁷ Both ideas, that of the Athenians' skill and experience at sea and that of the surprise caused the enemy by the revelation of Attic power, recur again and again, reaching their climax and ultimately their reverse in the Sicilian narrative.¹⁸ These themes serve, in effect, to reëcho Pericles' prediction of victory. The idea of surprise also shows that, unlike Archidamus, most of the enemy did not

¹⁷ II 85. 2.

¹⁸ Inasmuch as the Athenians then found themselves in the position in which they had formerly placed the enemy (VII 36, 55).

understand how strong Athens was, a fact several times emphasized by Thucydides.¹⁹ When, therefore, in spite of the plague and in spite of her later political mistakes, Athens continued to confound her opponents, the fact only confirmed Pericles' foresight, the correctness of which Thucydides had set forth from the beginning.

For the rest, the year 429 also saw a torrential incursion of some 150,000 Thracians into Macedonia in support of Athens. For some mysterious reason the Athenians failed to coöperate. They had not expected the Thracian king to move, Thucydides says.²⁰ The plague and fear of Greek public opinion may have been added reasons. Here occurs his extremely careful account of Thrace, the Thracian tribes, and the army's route southward, part of which was quoted earlier as an example of his detailed manner at its best. It is here also that he appends the account of Macedon under Archelaus (413-399),²¹ which was mentioned in the first chapter as illustrating the difference of his point of view from that of Plato and as of possible bearing on the date of his death. Like the estimate of Pericles' successors, it also shows his practice of occasionally looking forward in digressions.

With the account of the Mytilenean revolt of 428-27, we return to the complex of ideas first expressed in the estimate of Pericles' successors and the description of the plague. As the speeches at the council of Sparta had illustrated Thucydides' view of the causes of the war, so the great debate on the punishment of the Mytileneans

¹⁹ I 121. 4, IV 85. 2, V 14. 3, VII 28. 3, VIII 24. 5.

²⁰ II 101. 1.

²¹ II 100.

vividly reveals what he had said of the mounting bitterness and confusion of Athenian politics after the death of Pericles. The episode unfolded as follows. In the spring of 428 the oligarchs, who had never been unseated as the governing power in Mytilene, the chief city of Lesbos, conceived that the time had come when, unlike any other Aegean people that had previously made the attempt, they could successfully revolt from Athens. The means by which they were to do so was to be Spartan and Boeotian help. Athens, however, was informed of the plan and, hard-pressed though she was by the invasion of that spring, blockaded Mytilene before help arrived.

Late in the summer envoys from Lesbos appeared at Olympia before a Peloponnesian assembly held on the occasion of the games, and Thucydides records their speech,²² which in many ways serves as a companion piece to the speech of the Athenian envoys at Sparta recorded in the first book. The latter comprised a justification for empire; the present speech forcefully expresses the feelings of those states which, originally leagued with Athens against Persia, had seen themselves fall more and more under her sway as the Persian menace vanished. The Mytileneans ended by asserting that a second invasion of Attica in this year, together with a massing of the Peloponnesian fleet at the Isthmus, would force the Athenians to retire from Lesbos thereby in turn liberating the Lesbian fleet. This plan the Spartans, now pressing for a victory, adopted. But while preparations were still under way, the Athenians

²² III 9-14.

manned a hundred new ships from levies normally exempt from naval duty and sent these to the Isthmus without recalling the other fleet. Thucydides notes once again the sense of shocked surprise (*παράλογος*) which this fresh display of power elicited.²³ The invasion was called off, and with it died any prospect of success that the Mytileneans might have had. In the spring of 427, to be sure, the Spartans repeated these tactics, sending to Lesbos in addition forty ships that had been prepared during the winter. But these, as might have been expected, never reached their destination, and Mytilene surrendered from lack of food. It is worth observing that surrender was forced on the oligarchs only when the Spartan commander rashly gave out arms to the populace.²⁴ The mass of the people, here as later, are pictured as friendly to Athens. In sum, the Athenians had successfully weathered the two things that they had most to fear, revolt of the allies and the growth of an enemy fleet. Nevertheless, they had been badly frightened, and that fear remains as the undertone of the great debate which follows on a fitting punishment for the captured city.

Or rather, the punishment was promptly voted: it was to execute all the men in Mytilene and to sell the women and children into slavery. But by the next day, Thucydides says, qualms had arisen over this monstrous decision,²⁵ and the debate which he records is on a motion to rescind it. The advocate of severity, as before, was Cleon, described as "the most violent of the citizens, the man who at this time carried by far the greatest weight

²³ III 16. 2.

²⁴ III 27. 3.

²⁵ III 36. 4.

with the people.” He is first known as having opposed Pericles towards the end of the latter’s life. In these years he was solidifying his popular support by attacking the more conservative Athenian leaders, and he was presently to emerge as the chief proponent of a war of conquest. Since Thucydides unquestionably owed his exile to this latter policy and very possibly to Cleon himself, it is natural that he has been suspected of some animus against him.²⁶ On the other hand, his portrayal of Cleon is an organic part of the *History* as a whole. The passages discussed at the start of the chapter show that war, to his mind, evoked emotions extremely hostile to sane leadership. The famous account of the revolutionary effects of war follows in a few pages, and there can be no doubt that Cleon’s violence in the present speech is also intended to exemplify what is said there. Moreover, he appears in the main simply as the man who abandoned two of Pericles’ cardinal policies: moderation towards the empire and avoidance of large-scale risks. Clearly, then, whatever the historian’s private feelings may have been, he formed an estimate of Cleon, as he had of Pericles, during their lifetimes and later wove it into the texture of his political thought. The account of Cleon’s war policies comes later. Here he appears primarily as a demagogue whose appeals to emotion and self-interest divided the city and endangered the empire in the way described in II 65.

His speech falls into two parts: first, a volcanic tirade against the democratic practice of full discussion and then a plea for the death penalty as both just to the

²⁶ Notably by Grote in his well-known ch. 54.

Mytileneans and calculated to strengthen Athens' grip on the allies. As for the first topic, it offers a startling contrast to Pericles' praise of free debate in the Funeral Oration. So much is clear even in his first sentence: "I have often realized before now that a democracy was incapable of governing but never more so than in your present change of heart."²⁷ But Cleon attacks not only debate but the whole faith in reason and education that underlies it. "It is terrible," he cries, "for us not to see that a state with solid, though inferior, laws is stronger than one with good laws that are not kept — that simple ignorance is more useful to us than cleverness run riot, and that the masses are on the whole better citizens than the intelligent."²⁸ In his appeal to the populace, the demagogue denies Pericles' belief that all elements in a democracy can pool their intelligence to the common good. Ironically enough, he expresses a suspicion of reason almost exactly like that which Archidamus had called characteristic of Sparta. This impatience with democracy because it is slow is of course always symptomatic of wartime, and that Cleon was expressing a well-known attitude is shown by the appearance of similar arguments in Euripides' contemporary *Andromache*.²⁹

Both Thucydides and Aristophanes make clear that Cleon was a past master at slander (*διαβολή*), and Euripides evidently alludes to the fact when he says that impugning peoples' motives is one of the greatest dangers to a democracy.³⁰ Thus the historian is again true to Cleon's methods when he makes him go on to say that

²⁷ III 37. 1.

²⁸ III 37. 3.

²⁹ Lines 479-485.

³⁰ *Suppliants* 412-416.

those who had proposed the present reconsideration were either in the pay of the enemy or simply politicians playing for their own ends. And this attack brings him in turn to his famous indictment of the Athenians as lost to reality through the hypnotism of words. "You look on at debates," he says, "like spectators, and merely hear about action. A man's fluency will dictate whether any future policy seems practicable to you, and your judgment on past policies depends on how they are criticized. Your own eyesight appears no more trustworthy than what you hear. . . . But though quick to follow an argument, you are slow to see its consequences. You want another world entirely from the one we live in and are blind even to what is in front of you. In sum, you are drunk with the pleasures of listening and are more like a sophist's audience than a political assembly." ³¹ Cleon's allusion to the sophists is interesting. Early in the same year, the young Aristophanes had produced his first play, the *Banqueters*, as a satire on their influence, and within a few months the rhetorician Gorgias was to win a dazzling success in the course of his first visit to Athens. But of greater moment is the way in which Cleon, the watchdog of the people as he called himself, makes use of the ordinary man's suspicion of the new rationalism and eloquence. As his slander was intended to weaken specific opponents, so his more general claim that all speaking merely obscures reality was meant to sweep the people along on a tide of emotion typified in the wild flow of his own loose sentences.

In the first part of his speech Cleon thus attacks one

³¹ III 38. 4-7.

of Pericles' cardinal beliefs, his faith in reason. He then goes on to reverse the latter's whole attitude towards the empire. Pericles, to be sure, had spoken of Athens' power as tyrannical (a statement which, among others, Cleon conspicuously apes), but his conservative strategy as well as his express moderation towards the subject states were intended to soften the blunt fact of Athens' power. It is therefore only another mark of Cleon's demagogism when he appeals to the self-interest of the people by saying that they must absolutely destroy those who had rejected their sway. His argument has a certain specious justice, being inspired by the contemporary interest in the distinction between premeditated and unpremeditated crime which was to receive its classic statement in Aristotle's *Ethics* and to exert a vast influence on the development of legal theory. But actually he is thinking of the empire as founded simply on power. Hence he not only urges severity as a show of strength (mankind, he says, being contemptuous of kindness but awed by inflexibility); he even urges that the demos at Mytilene be executed as a warning to the lower classes elsewhere never to follow the aristocrats. His attitude is summed up in his crowning plea, "I maintain now as I have from the first that you must not change your mind nor make the mistake of yielding to the three impulses most disastrous to empire, pity, pleasure in words, and decency."³² As for pleasure in words, that, as we have seen, is all that remains of Pericles' faith in the reasonability of men. But the rejection of pity and decency is hardly less a departure from the famous sentence of the

³² III 40. 2.

Funeral Oration, "We get our friends by doing, not receiving, good." ³³ Even in the realistic third speech, it will be remembered, Pericles spoke of himself as fearful lest the Athenians too fully realize their power. Cleon's words, therefore, signify the brutality of mood to which the war was giving rise and which he was playing upon to build up a personal following.

But the war was still only in its fifth year, and it is significant of Thucydides' view of its deepening horror that, unlike the later decision in regard to Melos, this proposal was not carried out. Cleon's opponent was one Diodotus, a man otherwise unknown but probably the son of the moderate leader Eucrates, who was Pericles' first successor.³⁴ In any case, his speech betrays the terse and logical elegance which was the fruit of sophistic training, and his ideas are also conspicuously enlightened. Thus he is portrayed as an educated person of the sort that Cleon had just attacked. The position in which he found himself after Cleon had spoken is well described in a sentence from the chapter on revolutions, "The advocate of violence was always trusted; he who opposed him was suspect."³⁵ Diodotus labors hard under Cleon's charges that the proponents of mildness towards Mytilene were acting in the enemy's interest. Hence he struggles to defend Pericles' thesis regarding the value of calm debate. He even anticipates the modern system of a recognized opposition when he says that no democratic leader should have popularity enough to

³³ II 40. 4.

³⁴ Cf. A. B. West, *Classical Philology*, 19 (1924), p. 132.

³⁵ III 82. 5.

quash all opponents, but that, even when a man's advice is not followed, he must be respected as performing a necessary public function.³⁶ Nowhere does Cleon's popular support appear more clearly than in this desperate plea by Diodotus to be heard with an open mind.

As for the motion in hand, he takes a surprising and extremely clever line when he agrees with Cleon that motives of pity or kindness need not enter into the debate. But by the same token, he goes on, justice has nothing to do with it either, and, though Cleon had represented the death penalty as deserved, that was not the question; the sole question was what penalty would be most to Athens' advantage. There follows the well-known passage quoted in the second chapter, to the effect that human beings are fundamentally irrational and cannot be deterred by any known means from following their inmost desire.³⁷ We know from Plato's *Protagoras*³⁸ that the retributive theory of punishment was being given up in these years in favor of the view that offenses can be checked only by diminishing their causes. This is Diodotus' view when he asks, "Did any state ever revolt with what it thought insufficient resources of its own or its allies? Men by nature commit offenses, whether as states or as individuals, and no law will ever stop them." People in all conditions of life, he goes on, are obsessed by some special goal, and desire and hope are always present in their minds, "the former leading the way and prompting the plan, the latter following with assurances of good luck." That being the case, he concludes, any punishment inflicted on the

³⁶ III 42. 5-6.

³⁷ III 45.

³⁸ 324 a-c.

Mytileneans would not prevent other cities from revolting. On the contrary, the only way to prevent revolt was to keep the good will of the masses, which Athens could now do by leniency.

It is in many ways a disturbing speech. To Thucydides' mind, Diodotus certainly advocated both the wiser and the more humane course. Nevertheless, it is he who uses far the more cynical arguments, and the fact offers a bitter commentary on the mood of the day. The idealistic tones of the Funeral Oration are missing now, and the advocate of simple decency had no other course than to talk in terms of calculation. People's deafness to higher arguments seems to reflect, in part, a certain angry bewilderment not only at the more complicated problems of the time but, even more, at the number of subtle speakers who had now learned to play on their emotions. Certainly, Euripides, who often attributes extreme eloquence to his worst characters, emphasizes the same doubt of education which Cleon makes use of and which Diodotus tries to circumvent by talking strictly of self-interest. But, most of all, the hardening of tone which is to be felt in this debate illustrates the rising division which was coming about in Athens as a result of the war — a division brilliantly symbolized by the contrast between Cleon's burning nationalism and the dispassionate, if somewhat icy, voice of his conservative opponent. In the end, however, Diodotus won out. It was voted to execute only the oligarchic leaders at Mytilene, and messengers were dispatched to overtake those who carried the terrible decision taken earlier. This, Thucydides tersely adds, they were able to do,

because "the former ship sailed listlessly on her repulsive errand."³⁹ Even so, a considerable number were put to death.⁴⁰

The Mytilenean affair thus shows how the pressure of war was affecting Athens. But, as was remarked at the end of the last chapter, the Spartans to Thucydides' mind were not less responsive to the necessities of power, and, as if to emphasize that fact, he now goes on to the fearful treatment which they in their turn meted out to the Plataeans. The story of that unhappy people illustrates the dangerous position of any minority that occupies territory of some strategic value. Plataea commanded the best route between Boeotia and the Peloponnesus (it was for that reason that the Greeks had made their stand there during the Second Persian War), but for almost a century it had stood apart from the league of Boeotian towns controlled by Thebes and in self-protection had been allied with Athens. True to this alliance, the Plataeans had fought gloriously in the Persian wars, when Thebes had submitted. In the *History*, the story of Plataea begins with the unsuccessful *coup d'état* which was attempted with Theban support by oligarchic elements in the city just before the outbreak. Knowing Sparta's decision for war, the Thebans had wished to make certain of their communications with the Peloponnesus. Two years later, in the spring of 429, the Spartans strongly invested the city, and Thucydides

³⁹ III 49. 4.

⁴⁰ The figure 1,000 given in the MSS seems almost certainly a copyist's error. Cf. Classen-Steup, *ad loc.*, and Steup's discussion in his appendix to Book III.

tells how Archidamus, with customary Spartan piety, first adjured the Plataeans to submit and, when they refused, formally abrogated the pledge of eternal friendship made in 479 after the great victory.⁴¹ The Spartan dead had been buried at Plataea at that time, which had further strengthened the bonds now hurriedly broken. There follows the exciting tale of how in the autumn of 428 some two hundred and ten Plataeans and Athenians sallied out from the city on a rainy night, fought their way over the surrounding fortifications, and made good their escape.⁴² Finally, in the present summer of 427 the survivors surrendered on the promise of a fair trial.

Here again Thucydides records two conflicting speeches: a self-defense by the Plataeans in which they dwell largely on their glorious past, and a vitriolic condemnation by the Thebans in which they claim that mere hatred for themselves, rather than any high desire for liberty or love of Greece, had put Plataea on the right side in the Persian wars.⁴³ In such a spirit could the greatest traditions of Greece be traduced in the present state of national animosity. When the speeches were over, the Spartans asked each prisoner only one question — whether or not he had helped the Peloponnesian cause — and when the inevitable reply came, executed all the men, enslaved the women, and razed the city to the ground. Thucydides' whole account of Plataea is defective, in that he does not tell why the Athenians ever encouraged the unfortunate city to resist if they were not going to support it more strongly. Perhaps

⁴¹ II 71-74.

⁴² III 20-24.

⁴³ III 53-67.

they had planned to do so but in this case again had been checked by the plague. But his description of the Spartans' motives is certainly correct when he says that their every action towards Plataea was dictated by the need of satisfying their ally Thebes.⁴⁴ Here then, as in the case of Mytilene, the war was imposing its own harsh dictates on the contestants — perhaps the more strikingly so in this instance, because the executions were more thoroughgoing and because the Spartans had hitherto concealed their motives under the watch-cry of Greek liberty.

Thus Thucydides has so far sketched the brutalizing effect of the war on both Athens and Sparta and, in Athens' case, has further stressed the political divisions to which this state of passion gave rise, because he saw in those divisions the cause of her later ruin. This theme that war produces violence and violence political chaos now finds its greatest expression in the *History* in the terrific account of the revolution at Corcyra. Thereafter he dwells less on this process of degeneration, though the theme comes back in a slightly different form in the Melian Dialogue. Athens was then on the way to victory and therefore in a less violent mood than at the time of the Mytilenean revolt. As her prospects brighten, Thucydides in turn becomes more concerned to reveal the greatness of her power which he had analyzed at the beginning and to show in detail how it was dissipated. Then again, as was said in connection with his account of the plague, it is his express method to state an underlying condition once and then to assume

⁴⁴ III 68. 4.

it for the rest of his narrative. The following description of the revolutionary state of mind is therefore intended to set forth the ultimate cause of party strife in Athens and thus to prepare the way for his discussion of the concrete mistakes resulting from it. It is both the climax of what he has said up until now on the effect of the war and a dark prelude to the period of Athens' apparent victory.

In 427 Athens, beset by plague and rebellion, seemed headed for defeat, and it was this false appearance which gave rise to the revolution at Corcyra. Members of the oligarchic faction, many of them in Corinth's pay,⁴⁵ proposed and carried a motion to the effect that Corcyra should abrogate her alliance with Athens (the alliance that had been one of the causes of the war) and return to her previous state of neutrality. They prosecuted and later assassinated the leader of the democratic faction and, when a few Peloponnesian ships presently arrived at Corcyra, felt strong enough to attempt complete mastery. They seized the port and marketplace while the demos hastily gathered on the acropolis, and several days of fighting ensued in which fires were set and much of the city burnt down. Soon, however, with the appearance of a small Athenian fleet from Naupactus, the democrats gained the upper hand, but, to his credit, the Athenian general Nicostratus exerted a moderating influence, and a peace involving virtually no retaliations was arranged. Now occurred the supreme misfortune: the appearance of the main Peloponnesian fleet at a time when the oligarchic cause had waned and when the

⁴⁵ III 70. 1; cf. I 55. 1.

threat of attack (like that from the Prussian armies outside Paris in the autumn of 1792) served only to terrify and infuriate the demos. Actually the Peloponnesian fleet accomplished nothing. No greater display of Athenian skill was ever made than in the ensuing battle when, with twelve ships, they stood off fifty-three enemy ships, protected the retirement of the disorganized Corcyreans, and then retired themselves without loss. On the following day, the main Athenian fleet was sighted, and the Peloponnesians made their escape southward along the coast and by pulley across the isthmus of Leucas. Delivered suddenly from its terror, the demos knew no check. Many of the oligarchic party were killed on the streets; some who had been forced to serve on the ships were taken off on pretext of a trial and executed; others who had taken refuge in a temple committed suicide there; and for several days a reign of terror continued, while the Athenian general Eurymedon, less willing or less able than his predecessor, did nothing to prevent it. People were killed, says Thucydides, for money and others for revenge, and "all that usually takes place at such a time took place and much beyond."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ A remarkable parallel to the present passage exists in a letter of Lincoln of October, 1863, concerning outbreaks of violence in the border state of Missouri (Nicolay and Hay, *Complete Works*, 1894, II, 420). There appears to be no evidence that Lincoln knew Thucydides. If so, the parallel is to be explained by the similar attempt of the two men to describe the basic nature of the disorder. After noting the passions aroused by civil war, Lincoln goes on, "At once sincerity is questioned and motives are assailed. Actual war coming, blood grows hot, and blood is spilled. Thought is forced from old channels into confusion. Deception breeds and thrives. Confidence dies and universal suspicion reigns. Each man feels an impulse

His general observations now follow, and it is worth while to quote them fairly completely.⁴⁷ "So savage was the course of the revolution, and it made the greater impression because it was the first. Afterwards virtually the whole Greek world was in convulsion, differences everywhere existing which allowed populistic leaders to call in the Athenians and oligarchs the Spartans. And though in peace such men would have had neither the excuse nor the desire for help, in war each side, eager to damage the enemy and thereby benefit itself, readily furnished allied support to all revolutionists. In the course of these struggles, the calamities which befell the various states were as fearful as they were numerous, calamities which are always occurring and will continue to occur so long as human nature remains the same and which will vary only in form and degree as altering circumstances dictate. For in peace and prosperity both states and individuals are of a better mind, being free from undesired compulsions. But war, by destroying the ease of daily life, is a harsh teacher and lowers the mood of the masses to the level of contemporary circumstances. Accordingly revolution ran its course through the Greek states, and where it occurred last, and men had learned

to kill his neighbor, lest he be first killed by him. Revenge and retaliation follow. And all this, as before said, may be among honest men only; but this is not all. Every foul bird comes abroad and every dirty reptile rises up. These add crime to confusion. Strong measures deemed indispensable, but harsh at best, such men make worse by maladministration. Murders for old grudges, and murders for pelf, proceed under any cloak that will best cover for the occasion. These causes amply account for what has occurred in Missouri, without ascribing it to the weakness or wickedness of any general."

⁴⁷ III 82-83.

from earlier attempts, a more extravagant inventiveness was to be seen in the complexity of the attacks and the refinement of the punishments.

“Usage also changed, and words ceased to connote the acts that they formerly had. The most extreme recklessness came to be considered merely the courage due a party member; prudent delay was called secret cowardice; restraint, the cloak of weakness; and the ability to understand all sides, the inability to act on any. The advocate of violence was always trusted; any who disputed him was suspect. To plot successfully was to be called clever; still more so, to anticipate an enemy’s plot. If, on the other hand, you took steps in advance to avoid either of these courses, you passed as a traitor to the party and afraid of the enemy. In sum, to harm an opponent before he harmed you was thought praiseworthy, as was also to incite someone who had previously had no harmful intentions.

“Kinship, in addition, became a weaker tie than party because it was less adapted to acts of sudden daring. For the latter associations were entered into not for mutual support under existent laws but in violation of those laws for the sake of power, and it was rather complicity in crime than religious law which enforced oaths. Accordingly, when you were on top, you took all fair protestations on the part of your enemy in a spirit of self-protection, not of honor, and it was thought better to take revenge before suffering it. And since such oaths of reconciliation as were in fact given were offered by both sides only to meet an immediate difficulty, they lasted just so long as neither got fresh support from

elsewhere. But when the opportunity offered and a man plucked up courage to take the enemy off his guard, revenge was sweeter because of the previous state of confidence than if it had been taken openly, and it was considered that such conduct was simply a matter of safety and, besides, that success by cunning showed superior intelligence. The masses, in their proneness to evil-doing, can more easily be called clever than, in their ignorance, they can be termed high-minded, and they are ashamed of the latter name and proud of the former.

“The cause of all this was government for the sake of power and ambition, which in turn inspired the intense rivalry of the contestants. Party leaders in the various states would hold up specious slogans — ‘political equality for the masses’ or ‘a moderate aristocracy’ — but though they talked of the public good, they actually made it their spoils. There resulted an unsparing struggle for mastery in which men took fearful risks and inflicted still more terrible punishments. For neither side limited itself by any principle of justice or the public good but simply by what chanced to seem desirable at the time, and, when they had seized power by a dishonest trial or by violence, they were prepared to satisfy all present hatreds. As a result, neither side felt any scruples, but those merely gained a better name who managed to cloak some act of malice under a decent excuse. Meanwhile, the moderate element was killed off by both sides, either for not joining in the struggle or because the others begrudged their survival.

“Thus through revolution every form of viciousness

became established among the Greek people, and that simple trust which is the main element in high character disappeared, laughed to scorn, while an attitude of convinced, suspicious hostility between man and man everywhere took its place. As forces of reconciliation, promises lacked weight and oaths authority. Rather, everyone on coming into power felt the hopelessness of security and, in his concern for his own safety, was incapable of giving trust. And the slower intellectually as a general rule won out. For recognizing their own disadvantage as against the enemy and fearing to find themselves outwitted through his superior quickness of mind, they took boldly to action. Those, on the other hand, who contemptuously felt that they could foresee all dangers and hence need not forestall by action what they could effect by intrigue in general were killed before they could protect themselves."

This terrible summary is intended to cover the various outbreaks of political violence throughout the Greek world which hereafter he merely notes in passing. But since in the estimate of Pericles' successors he expressly calls revolution the cause of Athens' defeat, what he says here applies to Athens also. Moreover, the close correspondence between this passage and those considered earlier shows that he did not think of revolution as bursting unexpectedly upon Athens towards the end of the war, but as the slow culmination of earlier party strife. Thus, as was noted, his account of the plague, like the present account, depicts the settled standards of normalcy as overthrown in periods of severe distress. Again, the conflict between violence and reason which

emerged in the Mytilenean debate appears here as a general phenomenon of revolution. Similarly, the mood of harsh expediency revealed both in that debate and in the whole account of Sparta's conduct towards Plataea clearly represents a stage in the transformation of values which is here called characteristic of revolution. But most important of all, what he says in this passage of the motives of party leaders is almost identical with what he had said on the same subject in the estimate of Pericles' successors. Hence there can be no doubt that he looked on Cleon as potentially a revolutionary figure, a man of violence who played on the natural animosities of the time for his own profit. Accordingly, he can later say of him that he prolonged the war, "thinking that in peace his malpractices would be more transparent and his accusations less credible,"⁴⁸ a judgment which corresponds exactly with what is said here of the motives of most party leaders. In sum, this general summary is the key to his specific observations on Athenian politics. Certainly it is of unrivalled power and depth, and offers the best instance in the *History*, apart from the speeches, of Thucydides' desire and ability to rest his work on the lasting truths of men's social experience.

Now this inexorable downward course, whereby war produced unrest and unrest party strife, could clearly have none but a disastrous end for democratic Athens, unless peace were restored as early as possible. Pericles had realized that fact when he declared for a defensive war which could be ended as soon as Sparta saw that Athens was, as he himself believed, impregnable. All

⁴⁸ V 16. 1.

therefore hung on whether, when an opportunity for a favorable but moderate peace arrived, Athens would accept it. This would be the test of whether the downward process already described could be checked or whether it was to go on to its terrible conclusion. In the victory of Pylos and in the Spartan offer of peace which followed, Thucydides' narrative both logically and dramatically therefore reaches its first great climax, and that episode with its immediate results forms the natural conclusion of this chapter.

The tide began to turn in Athens' favor with the discovery in Demosthenes of an extremely energetic and imaginative, perhaps over-imaginative, general. Thucydides, who was himself presently to be elected general, seems to have known him well. His detailed account of Demosthenes' Acarnanian campaign in 426 may indicate that he served under him there, and he almost certainly heard the story of Pylos from his lips. The rise of Demosthenes also coincided with a new offensive effort inspired by the popular party at Athens. In the autumn of 427, the first expedition was sent to Sicily, partly for purposes of reconnaissance and partly to intercept shipments of grain to the Peloponnesus (more will be said on Athens' aims in Sicily in the next chapter). In the following summer this force was strengthened and its commander, the conservative Laches known to fame from Plato's dialogue, was replaced and prosecuted for inefficiency. Even Nicias, the leader of the conservatives, failed of election as general in 426. Demosthenes meanwhile was to execute a version of the plan of invading Boeotia from the west that was re-

peated with disastrous results in the year of Delium, when Cleon was at the height of his power. As a recent historian has said,⁴⁹ the events of this year all signify a revival of the old dream, which Pericles had renounced after the Treaty of 445, of combining control of central Greece with mastery of the sea.

These hopes, to be sure, came to a speedy end for the present, when Demosthenes tried to march eastward against Boeotia from Naupactus through the wilds of Aetolia and saw his hoplites, who were quite unsuited to fighting in such country, slowly worn down and cut to pieces by the natives (the same that had been compared to Homer's people in the *Archaeology*). He even almost lost Naupactus to a Peloponnesian force of three thousand men which was sent out at the news of this reverse. But at the end of the year he redeemed himself brilliantly. The Peloponnesians, after failing to take Naupactus, proceeded northwestwards to the Ambracian Gulf, where they joined the city of Ambracia in an attack on Athens' ally, the town of Amphilocheian Argos. Demosthenes followed and in successive engagements near Argos succeeded in ambushing first the Peloponnesians and then a fresh force from Ambracia. The latter defeat Thucydides calls the greatest disaster to have been sustained by any Greek city in a similar length of time during the war.⁵⁰ The surviving Peloponnesians bought their escape by accepting a secret offer of safe-conduct which Demosthenes made them in the knowledge that such an act of betrayal would ruin their

⁴⁹ A. B. West, *Classical Philology*, 19 (1924), p. 201.

⁵⁰ III 113. 6.

influence in the region for years to come. Thus in one campaign he established an ascendancy in the northwest, to gain which had been one of Athens' motives in the Corcyrean alliance and hence one cause of the war.

Now follows the year of Pylos, 425. It is hardly necessary, perhaps, to retell in detail the well-known story of how Demosthenes occupied the hilly promontory lying deserted and unthought of a short distance up the western coast of the Peloponnesus. He had perhaps learned of it from the Messenians of Naupactus, and it had commended itself to his imagination for several reasons: because it contained a spring, was surrounded by water on all sides except the north, and overlooked to the south the one good harbor on this whole coast, the bay now called Navarino, sheltered behind the island of Sphacteria. Even a small force established on this inaccessible hill had a good chance of standing off a far superior enemy, so long as its communications by sea remained open. Its function would be that sketched by Pericles at the start of the war: to carry out raiding, to stir up revolt among the helots, and in general to face the Spartans with dangers that would distract them from Attica.⁵¹ But Demosthenes had been relieved of his command because of his failures of the previous year, and, though his later success had won him reelection for the present year of 425/4, he was not yet in office. He accordingly asked for and received the permission of the assembly to be taken along as a private citizen by the generals Eurymedon and Sophocles, on their way to Sicily with forty ships, and to receive such help from

⁵¹ I 142. 4-5.

them as he needed. He was clearly in a somewhat irregular position, and the element of chance which Thucydides emphasizes in the whole episode resulted from that fact. Had he been in office, he would have been independent of chance. As it was, Eurymedon and Sophocles opposed his fortifying Pylos, and it was only when a storm detained the fleet that the soldiers, through boredom as much as anything else, fell to work and built the necessary wall above the isthmus connecting the promontory with the mainland. Then Demosthenes was left behind with five ships, presently augmented by certain Messenians from Naupactus, with whom an arrangement had no doubt been made the year before.

It was unquestionably part of Demosthenes' original plan that the rest of the ships should intercept the Peloponnesian fleet, which was then in the neighborhood of Corcyra. This, however, they failed to do, and Demosthenes presently found himself facing attack not only by the Peloponnesian army, which had duly returned in haste from Attica, but from the sea as well. A terrific engagement followed through a day and a half in which the Athenians barely maintained themselves both on the isthmus and on the rocky shore to the west, where the Spartan Brasidas wrecked ship after ship in an effort to force a landing. Then, on the evening of the third day, after the Spartans had temporarily paused to collect timbers for siege machinery, the Athenian fleet under Eurymedon and Sophocles returned. This was the turning point. Some four hundred and twenty Spartan hoplites with their attendant helots had previously been landed on the island of Sphacteria. The Peloponnesian

plan had been, so Thucydides says, to block both channels around the island into the bay so that the fleet could retire there in safety, and these men were apparently to prevent the Athenians from meanwhile beaching on the island. Thucydides underestimates the width of the southern channel and was perhaps misinformed about the plan by Spartans with whom he appears to have talked later.⁵² In any case, the channels were not blocked, and on the morning of the fourth day, when the Peloponnesians refused battle in the open sea, the Athenians sailed into the bay, shattered the enemy fleet, and gained complete control of all access to the island. The men there, though far as yet from being captured, were now quite cut off. Thucydides notes, especially in regard to the first engagement, the strange paradox of Athenians defending the Peloponnesus against a Spartan attack by sea.⁵³ His remarks bring to a climax all that he had said of the Spartans' shocked surprise on earlier occasions, and it is significant of the design of the *History* that, at the height of the struggle for Syracuse,⁵⁴ he returns to this passage to emphasize how the Athenians then found themselves in the same position in which they had now placed the Spartans. But for the moment, through a brilliant adaptation of Pericles' original strategy, the Athenians had victory in their grasp. They had broken the enemy fleet, secured hostages, and raised the terrible specter of a helot revolt.

⁵² The numerous attempts to explain Thucydides' mistake regarding the width of the southern channel are well discussed by A. W. Gomme, *Essays in Greek History and Literature*, Oxford, 1937, pp. 125-131.

⁵³ IV 12. 3.

⁵⁴ VII 71. 7.

Given the quietism of Sparta which had been so stressed at the outset, an advantageous peace was sure to be offered.

Indeed, there is reason to believe that the peace party was already in the ascendant in Sparta. The King Pleistoanax, who had been exiled for failing to invade Attica in 446, had been recalled on the death of Archidamus, and Aristophanes speaks of an offer which had apparently demanded from Athens only the surrender of Aegina.⁵⁵ Now, however, the Spartans were willing to go much further. A severe truce was arranged whereby, in return for the right of provisioning the men on the island, Spartan warships not only at Pylos but throughout all Laconia were handed over for safekeeping while ambassadors made their way to Athens.

Thucydides records their speech,⁵⁶ which can be called the dead center of the *History*, the point at which the earlier estimate of both Athens and Sparta is fully confirmed, and where the destructive forces analyzed since the beginning of the war seem to hang suspended before falling with their full, devastating impact. The speech sounds, and was intended to sound, most reasonable. Thus the ambassadors begin by saying that, as experienced people are not unduly surprised at success and do not trust it too far, so the Athenians might well consider the advantages of ending the war while they were in a good position and the Spartans, though not beaten, were in a relatively bad one. They admit their error in judgment in beginning the war but warn the Athenians

⁵⁵ *Achar.* 653.

⁵⁶ IV 17-20.

against envisaging wider conquests — both of which points, it need hardly be said, exactly reflect Pericles' initial views. They then go on to offer not only peace but an alliance, and their words here have the poignancy of things obviously reasonable but rarely achieved. "In our opinion," they say, "great enmities cannot be decisively ended when one side continues until it has won a majority of successes and then binds its enemy by oath to an unequal peace. They can be ended only if, though able to pursue such a course, the victor out of decency and honor offers a moderate settlement quite different from what the beaten enemy expected. The latter then owes no debt of vengeance, as having been forcibly treated, but rather an answering debt of gratitude. . . . It is human nature to yield gracefully to one who has himself freely yielded, but to fight on against an imperious enemy at insensate risks." ⁵⁷

The offer of alliance went beyond the Treaty of 445 and more than fulfilled Athens' original war aims. The question has often been discussed whether, after 445, Pericles had become convinced that Athens' expansion was over, at least on the mainland, and the historian's answer evidently is that he had become so convinced, so far as the present war was concerned. Presumably he would have held that, after its successful issue and assuming a continued decline in Spartan vigor, Athens, as the more progressive, more modern state, would inevitably gain in influence and might some day go on to a still greater future. But, for the present, he had sufficiently respected the enemy and sufficiently feared the

⁵⁷ IV 19. 2-4.

expansionist policies of the extreme democrats at home that he had aimed not at mastery but at parity for Athens — which was now obtained. Thus from his point of view, and that of Thucydides, the Spartan offer should have been accepted. But it was not accepted. Cleon moved to demand all the territory in Achaea, the Megarid, and the peninsula of Argos that Athens had ever held at her period of widest expansion in the fifties, and, when the ambassadors would have treated secretly even of these demands (they clearly could not have done so openly), he cried out that secret arrangements were hostile to the interests of the demos. Negotiations were broken off. Cleon had roused the people to visions of grandeur, and Athens was committed to a war of expansion. Thucydides notes the fact in the ominous phrase, which is to recur again and again in one form or another from now on through the Sicilian narrative, “they strove for more,” *πλέονος ὠρέγοντο*.⁵⁸ The phrase expresses the instability born of the sufferings and demoralization described earlier, and its emergence is the sign that these experiences had radically affected Athenian democracy.⁵⁹

The remaining events down to the Peace of Nicias can be quickly told. After fighting had begun again, the Spartans on Sphacteria proved a problem, since it was

⁵⁸ IV 21. 2.

⁵⁹ It is perhaps Thucydides' strangest omission that he fails to mention the doubling of the tribute which was now put through, evidently under Cleon's leadership. *I.G.* i². 63 (cf. M. N. Tod, *Greek Historical Inscriptions*, Oxford, 1933, pp. 148–163, and *Cambr. Anc. Hist.* V 236). He was thus enabled to strengthen himself politically by raising the pay of jurymen from two to three obols (*ibid.*, pp. 101–102).

harder actually to lay hands on them than to use them for purposes of negotiation. They were being secretly provisioned, and winter was approaching, when Athenian ships would no longer be able to patrol the island. After some weeks of delay, Cleon finally observed in the assembly that, if the generals were men, they would take a force and capture the Spartans. Nicias, at whom this shaft was chiefly aimed, thereupon betrayed his famous and fatal hesitancy by replying that he would resign his command to Cleon if the latter wished. Nothing could better reveal the acrimony of contemporary politics or cast a less pleasant light on the negative mood of the conservatives. Cleon was somewhat staggered but, knowing that Demosthenes had a plan for capturing the men, finally accepted. The plan, inspired by Demosthenes' own reverses in Aetolia the year before, was to wear out the superb but immobile, because heavily armed, enemy by the use of considerable numbers of light-armed troops. Direct engagement with the celebrated Spartan hoplites could be avoided, because the island had recently been burned over and there was no chance of ambush. When Cleon arrived at Pylos, a landing was accordingly made on the island and the plan duly put into operation.

Few passages in the *History* are better known than the brilliant following description of the Spartans' resistance: how, blinded by the dust from the recent fire, worn out with their incessant efforts to get at the elusive enemy, and exposed from dawn to dusk to a deadly stream of stones, arrows, and javelins, they kept their ranks and retired to several positions, until finally, sur-

rounded on the high point of the island, they surrendered, having lost approximately a third of their numbers, including two successive commanders.⁶⁰ Thucydides dwells amply on their heroism, as well as on the shock to Greek opinion that, unlike their forebears at Thermopylae, they had not preferred to die. When one remembers the severe code of the Spartans, their long-established reputation, and the difference in social status between light-armed troops and the well-to-do hoplites, who enjoyed leisure for their training and money for their elaborate armor, the full effect of the defeat can be imagined. As Thucydides later observes,⁶¹ it seemed to the Spartans that the very foundations of their state and army had crumbled and that a new society with which they could no longer cope was in the ascendant.

Though credit for the victory belonged chiefly to Demosthenes, Cleon vastly gained by it, and the stage was set for what was to be a final and decisive effort in the following year, 424. Something of the people's sanguine mood is to be seen in the punishment which they inflicted on three generals who returned in that summer after accepting a general truce in Sicily. They exiled two and fined the third. "So confident," says Thucydides, "had their success made them that they would meet no opposition but could carry through any conquest whatsoever, possible or remote, by any force, adequate or inadequate."⁶² The historian himself was probably elected to succeed one of these generals, and by the end of the year he had met the same fate.

⁶⁰ IV 33-38.

⁶¹ IV 55.

⁶² IV 65. 4.

The season began well when Nicias occupied the island of Cythera and from there proceeded to carry out raids in Laconia itself. It is here that Thucydides makes his previously mentioned comments on the Spartans' demoralization. As was prophesied in the speeches of the first book, their narrow imagination had in fact proved inadequate to the demands of the war. But soon Athens' tide of success began to turn. One of her weapons, now as in the fifties, was the propagandistic force of democracy. Attacks on Megara and Boeotia were to be greeted by local revolutions, and a great victory was to be won which would establish democracy under Athenian control throughout central Greece. But at Megara in mid-summer the plan only half succeeded. The walls connecting the town with the harbor were duly betrayed by night to waiting Athenians and the harbor was captured. But the democrats in the city (waiting anointed with oil so that they could recognize each other) failed to get the upper hand, and from nearby Sicyon the energetic Brasidas, who now emerges as the almost singlehanded savior of the Peloponnesian cause, presently relieved the city. Then, late in the year, the great defeat took place. A complicated plan of attack on Boeotia had been arranged whereby Demosthenes was to enter by sea from the Corinthian Gulf, a revolution was to break out in the town of Chaeronea, and an Athenian army was to cross the Attic border at Delium. These events, occurring simultaneously, were to prevent resistance in force at any one place. But the timing was bad. Demosthenes reached his objective too early and was repulsed; the revolution failed to break out; and when the Athenian

army under Pericles' nephew Hippocrates reached Delium, it faced the redoubtable Boeotian forces entire. Pagondas, the Theban general, adumbrating the tactics later perfected by Epaminondas, made use of an extremely heavy column twenty-five ranks deep,⁶³ with which he completely shattered the Athenian line of eight ranks. A rout followed, and Cleon's hopes of conquest vanished.

But Delium was not the sole disaster of this year. After relieving Megara, Brasidas had made a hurried march northward, adroitly effected a passage through neutral Thessaly, and appeared at the border of Athens' Thraceward provinces. No move could have been better calculated to injure Athens than thus to strike at the sources of her strength. It had been Pericles' repeated warning that the empire must at all costs be kept intact, and how closely this policy was tied to his other cardinal policy of avoiding large-scale offensives is shown by the fact that Thucydides, who was now one of the two generals in Thrace, had only seven ships at his command. Clearly all attention in Athens was focussed on the campaign in Boeotia, and, when Brasidas' arrival in Thrace was announced, Cleon would not or could not change his plans. Thucydides speaks in admiration of the rare mixture of force and diplomacy whereby Brasidas won over a number of towns in the Chalcidice, though the mass of the inhabitants, as had been the case at Mytilene, were friendly to Athens. Finally, by a sudden move in early winter he captured the important trading town of Amphipolis on the Strymon river, in spite of the efforts

⁶³ IV 93. 4.

of the second Athenian general who was stationed there and before Thucydides, who was stationed on the island of Thasos, could intervene.⁶⁴ It was for this failure — a failure which, given the forces then and previously at his command, would seem to have been unavoidable — that Thucydides was exiled. Like the generals who had been punished for accepting peace in Sicily, he seems to have been a victim of the peoples' exorbitant hopes. Indeed, after Delium, there must have been a still greater demand for scapegoats. But in the higher economy of the war, the loss of Amphipolis was in fact far-reaching. At Delium Athens' offensive momentum had been halted. But in Amphipolis she gave the enemy a counterpoise to Pylos and to the men taken there, and the effect of the earlier victory was virtually cancelled.

A year's truce, preparatory to negotiations for peace, was accordingly made in the following spring of 423. But the negotiations were held up because Brasidas, it was claimed, had taken another town, Scione, after the truce was made, and because Cleon wished to redeem his war policy by a final effort to retake Amphipolis. This he attempted to do in the summer of 422. The attack was unsuccessful, and in it not only he but Brasidas were killed. Aristophanes in the *Peace* hails the removal of what he calls the two pestles that had stirred the mortar of war in Greece,⁶⁵ and Thucydides also speaks of the two men as largely responsible for the war's continuance.⁶⁶ Early in 421, peace was therefore made on the basis of a return to the status of before the war. In a

⁶⁴ IV 104-106.

⁶⁵ Lines 265-275.

⁶⁶ V 16. 1.

sense, this, the so-called Peace of Nicias, represents a victory for Athens in that she had weathered the Peloponnesian attempt to destroy the empire. Nevertheless, not only had the course of events since Pylos revealed a potential weakness in the empire, but at home the bright vision of wider conquests had been raised. The downward course, the beginnings of which Thucydides has so far sketched, was not destined to end here.



CHAPTER VI

THE SICILIAN EXPEDITION

THE PRESENT chapter will follow to its height the gathering tide of unrest and error, the beginnings of which were traced in the last chapter. The Peace of Nicias, it is true, had vindicated Pericles' belief that the naval and commercial economy of Athens was more than a match for anything that her enemies had to offer. Like an Homeric hero who has thrown his one spear and missed, Sparta had lost the war, or at least failed of victory, when invasion of Attica had not proved enough. Nevertheless, the war had told heavily on Athens, in that the sufferings and the passion to which it gave rise had led not only to dangerous and costly policies but, what was worse, to extreme political disunion. Hitherto the underlying nature of this degenerative process has been chiefly emphasized, because such was the emphasis given by Thucydides himself in his accounts of the plague and Pericles' successors, the Mytilenean debate and the chapter on revolutions. But from now on it seems that, having stated the basic tendencies of the time in the passages just referred to, he consciously keeps to the more immediate causes of events. Certainly the Sicilian narrative reveals with startling force how, once the process of degeneration

had begun, any accident sufficed to drive it forward. So much is apparent in the crucial fact of the period: namely, that Alcibiades, on the eve of the expedition, laid himself open to attack by his political enemies and the timorous Nicias was left in command. In the Athenians' folly in recalling Alcibiades after the expedition had started, one can of course find, as Thucydides expressly found,¹ the supreme instance of a political disintegration which in turn goes back to the more general causes already treated. Nevertheless, Thucydides did not think such a disintegration in itself irresistible, since at Syracuse he shows the farsighted Hermocrates, in many ways a close counterpart of Pericles, winning out over the populist leader Athenagoras, who is an even closer counterpart of Cleon. Hermocrates personally checked the course of disaster for Syracuse. Had Athens, therefore, possessed another Pericles, the end would not have been what it was, even granted the degenerative forces implicit in the war.

It will be recalled that Pericles was said to have had four characteristics: he could see and expound what was necessary, he was patriotic and above money.² Athens' misfortune and the essential cause of her ruin was that none of his successors combined all these traits. Nicias, who was honest but inactive, had the last two; Alcibiades, who was able but utterly self-interested, had the first two; only the Syracusan Hermocrates combined them all. The general consensus that the Sicilian books have the power of a great tragedy seems to spring from the fact that, as in a tragedy, one feels the working of

¹ II 65. 11, VI 15. 3-5.

² II 60. 5.

deeper forces, yet is aware at the same time that, had certain seeming accidents not taken place, the outcome could have been averted. It seems that the human mind, while recognizing a guiding pattern beneath events, instinctively disbelieves that such a pattern controls all day-to-day happenings or is itself unaffected by them. The marvel of Thucydides' achievement in the Sicilian books is to have fused the sense of pattern and the sense of accident into a terrible and lifelike unity.

The Peace of Nicias was soon followed by an alliance between Athens and Sparta of the sort proposed at the time of Pylos. The two states, dominated for the moment by peace parties, were to coöperate in order to control Greece between them. But the terms of the peace were never fully carried out, and the alliance, instead of bringing Athens and Sparta together, only frightened Sparta's former allies into forming a new combination, to forestall which she soon drifted back into the old system. Clearly, the animosities roused by the war could not be quickly healed, and the conciliatory elements in both states had an impossible load of suspicion to overcome. Athens' grievances in regard to the treaty were that, although Sparta had contracted both to return Amphipolis and to force peace on all her allies, she had been able to do neither. Amphipolis continued to assert its freedom after the departure of the Spartan garrison, and the Corinthians and Boeotians refused to have any part in the settlement. The former, on the contrary, went on supporting the Chalcidic cities which had been left tributary to Athens, and the latter kept

both the prisoners taken at Delium and a fortress, Panacton, on the Attic border. Under these circumstances the Athenians, while returning the Spartan prisoners, saw fit to hold on to Pylos.

The decay of the alliance was more complicated and gradual. Thucydides' account of the tortuous diplomatic maneuvering which everywhere sprang into life immediately after the peace shows how badly the foundations of Greek life had been shaken. Sparta's prestige had been especially damaged, and her seeming weakness inspired all the smaller states to try to better themselves. Nowhere does Thucydides' initial insistence on the need of a unifying power in Greece, if progress and prosperity were to be maintained, find stronger support than in the melancholy picture of intrigue which he now gives. Briefly, what happened was this. Corinth, thinking herself deserted by Sparta, immediately turned to the latter's ancient enemy Argos, and the two states together found further support in Elis and Mantinea, both of which sought to escape from Sparta's yoke. Corinth then tried to draw Boeotia into this combination. But before that could be done, the Spartans themselves renewed their old alliance with the Boeotians, partly through fear of Athens but partly also to obtain the captured fortress of Panacton, which could then be traded for Pylos. This step, however, was contrary to the terms of the Athenian-Spartan alliance, and when in addition the Boeotians destroyed Panacton before returning it, Athenian suspicion flamed up violently. Then a symptomatic and ill-omened event took place. Alcibiades, who here makes his first appearance in the

History,³ conceived the characteristic idea that, if he could bring the combination of Argos, Corinth, Mantinea, and Elis into alliance with Athens, he would not only prepare the deathblow for Sparta but (what was perhaps more important to him) destroy the influence of the peace party at home. Nicias, the chief proponent of the peace, protested the Spartans' good faith and pleaded for time. But when he went in person to Sparta to demand that the Boeotian alliance be given up, he was refused. Elements hostile to the peace had come into power in Sparta also. Athens, accordingly, went on in the summer of 420 to ally herself with Argos, Elis, and Mantinea, Corinth meanwhile returning to her old position with Sparta. Thus, although neither the peace nor the alliance between Athens and Sparta were formally abrogated, they had virtually been written off within a year and a half after they had been signed. Alcibiades replaced Nicias as the dominating figure in Athenian politics, and a more dangerous, because far more gifted, successor to Cleon's war policies had been found.

Only two more events must be noted before we turn to the Sicilian narrative: Sparta's dramatic rehabilitation in 418, and Athens' attack on Melos two years later. Following the Argive alliance, Alcibiades, like Cleon, revived the old dream of land-empire when he won over Patrae in Achaea and, with Argive help, attacked the only city which prevented direct communication between Athens and Argos, namely Epidaurus. He was thus building an edifice of Attic power across the whole of the upper Peloponnesus, and unless Sparta acted soon,

³ V 43.

her already grave position would become perilous. In 418 she did act and, on the field of Mantinea in Arcadia, both restored her shaken leadership and gained a lease of power which was to carry through and beyond the end of the war.

Thucydides describes the campaign under King Agis in great detail.⁴ It began with an attack on Argos which Agis for various reasons did not press home, though his army, according to Thucydides, was the finest that had been collected up to that time. Then, when his Boeotian and Corinthian contingents had gone home, he was suddenly faced on the high Arcadian plain under Mount Maenalus with an allied force of Argives, Mantineans, and Athenians. Some divisions of the allied army were not present, but neither were the greater part of Sparta's supporters. The battle was won by the Spartans alone, and for that reason proved the vindication that it did. Here, as often in the past, the decisive element proved to be the famous Spartan discipline, since even at the end of several days' maneuvering Agis was hurried into battle, and in the course of the fight it was the Spartans in the center who held and then repulsed the enemy, although the left wing had been cut off and dispersed. Thucydides refuses to give the numbers engaged, though he calculates the seven Spartan companies (λόχοι) as approximately thirty-six hundred, exclusive of other contingents.⁵ He gives the enemy losses at eleven hundred, and says that the battle was the largest to have

⁴ V 57-75. The account is elaborately and critically analyzed by W. S. Woodhouse, *King Agis of Sparta and his Campaign in Arkadia in 418 B.C.*, Oxford, 1933.

⁵ V 68.

been fought for many years. The remark is significant not only for the present course of events but for the structure of Thucydides' work. Sparta's position as undisputed mistress of the Peloponnesus was restored, and the framework of alliances which Alcibiades had built up fell in ruins. But from the point of view of the *History* the remark shows that Thucydides thought of the war as gaining, rather than losing, momentum over the period of the Peace of Nicias. At the start Athens had been checked by the plague, and Sparta, traditionally conservative, had been slow in exerting her full weight, until with Pylos she had been put on the defensive. Now both sides were gathering force, and Thucydides refused to consider the peace as more than a breathing spell. Sparta's effort here was soon to be matched and surpassed by that of Athens at Syracuse, and the upheaval of Greek life which had been mentioned in the first sentence of the *History* was reaching its climax.

The other chief event before the expedition, the Athenian attack on the island of Melos in 416, is less noteworthy in itself than for Thucydides' famous account of it. This small Dorian island, situated some seventy miles off the east coast of Laconia, had never been included in the Delian Confederacy and, though attacked in 426 and assessed on the enlarged tribute list of the following year,⁶ had so far maintained its independence. Now, after the failure of Alcibiades' Peloponnesian policy, fresh interest seems to have been felt at Athens in exploiting the old advantages of naval power, and an expedition was sent to bring Melos forcibly within the

⁶ *I.G.* 12. 63, l. 65.

empire. Thucydides reports a parley which took place just before the siege between the Athenian generals and the magistrates of the island, and it is this, the terrible Melian Dialogue, which alone gives immortality to an otherwise forgotten act of oppression. As for the literary form of the dialogue, there is ample proof that the art of dialectic was as seriously studied at the time as that of oratory,⁷ and the somewhat formal play of discussion which Thucydides reports, like the formal arguments of his speeches, seems in part at least to reflect contemporary practice. He had earlier reported two short dialogues⁸ and, like Plato after him, no doubt valued the form, which derived from the dialogues of tragedy, for its lifelikeness.

The Athenians begin by limiting argument solely to questions of expediency and by ruling out entirely any consideration of abstract justice. When the Melians prophetically reply that unprovoked aggression of the type now contemplated would only increase Athens' enemies and thus could not be to her advantage in the long run, the Athenians coldly rejoin that, on the contrary, such displays of power were the best possible means of preserving and enlarging the empire. Cleon,

⁷ Aristotle (*Soph. Elench.* 183b 36) speaks of the early sophists as teaching not only oratory but eristic discussion, and models of such discussion from about the year 400 survive in the so-called *Δισσοὶ Λόγοι* (Diels-Kranz, *Vorsokratiker*⁵, II, 405-416). The same point regarding the advantage of eristic over oratory is made in Plato's *Protagoras* (329 a-b, 336 c-d) that is made here (V 85): namely, that oratory is attractive but misleading because it obscures logic and is heard only once. Socrates was evidently unique, not because he practised the art of question and answer, but because he practised only that art.

⁸ II 71-74, III 118.

it will be recalled, took exactly this position in the Mytilenean debate, but it is significant of the present stage of feeling that, instead of an angry demagogue, it is now Athenian generals who are speaking. Pericles' temperate ideal of empire has vanished, and the fearful change noted at the end of the chapter on revolutions is quite fulfilled: "trust, the main element in high character, disappeared, laughed to scorn, and a convinced, suspicious hostility between man and man everywhere took its place."⁹

The Athenians' scornful cynicism becomes more marked when the Melians go on to observe that submission would be disgraceful to them and that, moreover, since their cause was just, they would find help from the gods as well as from their fellow Dorians, the Spartans. But honor, the Athenians brutally reply, is a luxury which the weak can hardly afford to indulge in. And as for divine help, they continue, "we are neither claiming nor attempting anything that contradicts man's normal assumptions regarding the gods or his pretensions regarding himself. For we take it that it is generally believed of the gods, as it is demonstrably true of men, that they exercise power by the sanctions of superior natural strength. Nor are we the first to make this law or to use it."¹⁰ Finally, as regards the Spartans, they say, "we admire your simple-heartedness but do not envy your folly," if you expect help from them. They are famous for their feelings of honor among themselves, "but their behavior towards others offers a very broad topic indeed which we could perhaps

⁹ III 83. 1.

¹⁰ V 105. 1-2.

summarize by saying that, more than any people whom we know, they think that what they want is honorable and what is advantageous to them is just.”¹¹ Hence, they conclude, the Spartans will not conceivably undertake risks for so small a state as Melos. This estimate of the Spartans coincides with what was said earlier of their motives in the present war, and it is significant that, of the two previous dialogues just mentioned, one was recorded as taking place between Archidamus and the Plataeans. The position of the Spartans at Plataea in many ways resembled that of the Athenians here, in that both were asserting their will on a smaller enemy. The major difference is that, whereas Archidamus had couched his demands on Plataea in honorable language and had carefully disclaimed all religious guilt when these were rejected, the Athenians’ mocking scepticism is here quite open. In attributing to the gods their own belief that superior power sanctions any conduct, they reveal the total disappearance of higher standards and once again illustrate a remark in the chapter on revolutions, that, as men came to think increasingly in terms of struggle, belief in divine law vanished.¹²

The dialogue concludes with further pathetic efforts on the part of the Melians to escape the bitter choice confronting them and with expressions of mounting impatience by the Athenians. In the end, the city refused to submit, was besieged and finally taken. The men were executed, and the women and children were sold into slavery on the recommendation, we learn from other sources,¹³ of Alcibiades. Almost as severe a punishment

¹¹ V 105. 4.

¹² III 82. 6.

¹³ Plutarch, *Alcibiades* 16.

had been dealt out once before by Cleon to the rebellious town of Torone,¹⁴ which he captured just before his own death at Amphipolis. But Thucydides lays greater stress on the present attack because it represents an effort of conquest of the sort that was to be repeated on an infinitely larger scale at Syracuse and because he wished to make clear the mood in which these conquests were undertaken. The *Trojan Women* of Euripides, produced a few months later, shows how profoundly shocked and how despondent of the future the better elements in Athens now became. Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, produced some years later, also shows that the choice between honor and interest was not always represented as it was by the Athenian spokesmen in this dialogue. Nevertheless, the nature both of the dialogue and of the punishment casts a baleful light on the leaders and people of Athens as a whole. The city in which the Funeral Oration had been pronounced was emerging as frankly and simply the tyrant city, and, once it was prepared for this rôle, it would clearly not stop with so small a prize as Melos.

We are now at the fateful year of the Sicilian expedition, 415. Athens' relations with the new Greece in the west had been active, if comparatively recent. Though not one of the original colonizing states, she had founded the latest colony, Thurii, in 443 and had made alliances at about the same time with Leontini near Syracuse and Rhegium on the tip of Italy which were renewed on the eve of the war.¹⁵ One of the attractions, moreover, of the alliance with Corcyra had been that the

¹⁴ V 3. 4.

¹⁵ *I.G.* i². 51, 52.

island offered a convenient port of call on the route to the west. The purpose of these various steps appears to have been twofold: first, to impede so far as possible the unification of Sicily under the great Dorian state of Syracuse and, second, to forestall western help to Sparta in the event of war. No doubt other motives entered in, notably the desire of cutting into Corinth's trade and the hope that on some future day the influence thus gained might be turned to more positive account. Nevertheless, Athens' western policy was, at the start of the war, largely defensive.

With the rise of Cleon, however, it radically changed. Several passages in Aristophanes make clear that pictures of a dominion stretching beyond Syracuse to Carthage were part of the stock in trade of expansionist politicians.¹⁶ Even Pericles, opposed as he was to expansion, is apparently made to recognize such hopes when he says in his last speech that no people on earth could withstand the full power of the Athenian navy. It was natural therefore that, in preparation for the offensive of 426, Athens for the first time should have intervened actively on behalf of the states opposed to Syracuse. As was noted earlier, the intention was to investigate the possibilities for later conquest and at the same time to reduce the sending of foodstuffs to the Peloponnesus.¹⁷ The action that followed through the next two and a half years was somewhat desultory, though the Athenians at least preserved their alliance intact and prevented any striking success by Syracuse. Then through the efforts of the Syracusan Hermocrates,

¹⁶ *Knights* 174, 1303; *Peace* 250.

¹⁷ III 86. 4.

whose prophetic emergence at the time is signalized by an extremely diplomatic speech on Sicilian unity,¹⁸ peace was made in the summer of 424, and the Athenians were sent home. The punishment meted out to the returning generals by the angry demos was noted earlier as closely resembling that inflicted within a few months on Thucydides himself. He scornfully remarks, it will be remembered, that the people were quite ignorant of all that was involved in so immense a task as the conquest of Sicily.¹⁹

Nevertheless, the vision of conquest had been raised. It is significant that the historian expressly attributes to Alcibiades²⁰ the same hopes of conquering even Carthage that had been ridiculed in Aristophanes' *Knights* nine years before. How bold such hopes were appears from the fact that Sicily and Magna Graecia comprised almost a half of the Greek-speaking world — indeed, virtually all the world beyond Hellas and the Aegean that was not barbarian. For contemporary shipping, which lacked the use of the compass and for the most part hugged the coastline, Syracuse, moreover, was many days' sail from Athens. One must remember also that, though divided like Hellas itself by local quarrels, the new world of Greece did to some degree think of itself as a unit over against the old. Hermocrates in the speech just mentioned is made to appeal strongly to this almost continental sense of solidarity. Yet, under the influence of hopes long held up, the Athenians were ready to believe that even this world, being by nature maritime, could not resist their naval power. The results

¹⁸ IV 59-64.

¹⁹ IV 65.

²⁰ VI 15. 2, 90. 2.

of victory would be to double the emoluments of empire and to hem in the Peloponnesus on the west as well as on the east. It was generally believed, says Thucydides in a passage already cited, that so extended an empire would offer the common people of Athens "a perpetual source of employment."²¹ Moreover, success in such a venture would give unequalled prestige and even immense financial return to any leader who could carry it off. Under these circumstances and given the mood of the time, it was unlikely that the prospect of what would happen if the attempt failed would prove a deterrent.

The opportunity to intervene again in Sicily came in the winter after Melos, when Egesta, a small state at the western end of the island, appealed for help against its neighbor Selinus, which was in turn supported by Syracuse. As in 427 when Athens was called in by Leontini, the pretext was that further successes by Syracuse were dangerous, in that, being Dorian by blood and originally a colony of Corinth, she was a potential enemy. To be sure, Syracuse had not as yet helped the Peloponnesian cause, though asked to do so at the start of the war,²² but the fact could always be attributed to Athens' policy of keeping Sicily divided. In any case, emissaries were sent to Egesta to examine into the state of its reserves, and, when they returned in the following spring to report favorably (they were said to have been tricked by the Egestians, who borrowed gold and silver from the surrounding towns and temples to impress them), the expedition was voted. It is only now, after the decision was taken, that Thucydides gives his great

²¹ VI 24. 3.

²² II 7. 2, III 86.

debate on the whole subject of intervention between Nicias and Alcibiades, who, with Lamachus, were the generals designated. Just so, the debate on Mytilene had been on a motion of reconsideration, but the difference in outcome between the two debates is the measure of the change in Attic feeling.

Nothing could have boded less well for the future, especially in view of the fact that the success of the expedition was soon to rest almost solely on him, than Nicias' profound pessimism and reluctance. "Your temperament being what it is," he says, "my advice would go for nothing, if I urged you to safeguard your present position and not to stake all that you have on things conjectural and to come. I shall therefore simply show that your desires are untimely and their objects not easy to secure."²³ When Nicias thus shirks restating with any force Pericles' original warning against remote adventures, he is virtually beaten before he begins. The responsibility is partly his, partly the Athenian people's. As for the people, they had long since come to expect large benefits of the state and thus to favor what promised the quickest return. But Nicias, for his part, was in many ways a negative figure. At the time of Pylos he had allowed Cleon to carry off the spoils and thus to be in a position to prolong the war, and he had failed to implement the peace, when it came, by any positive action. As Thucydides repeatedly emphasizes,²⁴ he was simply a rich, respected, conscientious man, who was primarily interested in keeping his good reputation and quite incapable of firing, much less of checking, the peo-

²³ VI 9. 3.

²⁴ Esp. V 16. 1.

ple. He represents in Athens the attitude of *ἡσυχία*, "tranquillity," "preservation of the *status quo*," which at the start of the war had seemed characteristic of Sparta. No doubt, his timorousness is partly to be explained by the unhappy position in which any Periclean moderate found himself, now that the city was being rapidly split into frank reactionaries on the one hand and extreme populists on the other. Nevertheless, as was said earlier, his essential hesitancy of character must be put down in part to sheer misfortune. Certainly, the unfortunate effects of his leadership are strikingly visible here. For he goes on in the present speech to show how greatly Athens' dangers at home would be increased by such a commitment abroad. Then, seeing that the people were not convinced, he tried to deter them in a second speech by setting forth the full magnitude of the task ahead and by demanding a much larger force than had been originally planned. But though his warnings and his estimate of the coming task were, to Thucydides' mind,²⁵ quite just, his words had the opposite effect to that intended. The assembly took his advice and voted a large increase in the expeditionary force. Thus, by his inability to oppose the people bluntly as Pericles had done, he became a party to the expedition against his own judgment and, what was worse, the unwilling cause of its great size.

He is followed by Alcibiades in a speech which reveals

²⁵ He twice notes the people's ignorance of Sicily (IV 65. 4, VI 1) and attributes to Alcibiades (VI 17) a false estimate of the resistance that would be met at Syracuse. To be sure, he also believed that the Athenians, if properly led, could have overcome even this resistance (II 65. 11, VII 42. 3). Nevertheless, Nicias' position here is certainly meant to be correct.

to the full Thucydides' art of conveying a man's outlook in the tone and character of his words. As was said earlier, the historian normally omits personal details which have no bearing on the course of the war, and even in regard to Alcibiades, whose personal life did have such a bearing, he tells nothing of the lisping voice, the striking beauty, the charm, vanity, and almost theatrical wilfulness which struck others in the brilliant son of Cleinias and ward of Pericles. But it is significant that he almost never speaks of him without alluding to his driving egotism, and, in introducing him here, he notes further how his extreme ostentation had come to demand amounts of money which could hardly be recouped except through military conquest.²⁶ Pericles at the start of the war had preferred to make over his estates to the people rather than to risk the possibility of slander if the Spartans intentionally spared them.²⁷ But if Alcibiades, as the present speech shows, had Pericles' ability to dominate the people by the sheer force of his will — something that Nicias lacked entirely — he had the fatal flaw of not being, as Pericles had been, above money. Nor, as is clear from his later desertion to Sparta, was he in any sense patriotic. Hence one returns again to Athens' calamity in having, as rival leaders, two men whose virtues, though complementary, were in each case marred by glaring faults.

Since Nicias had alluded slurringly to his ostentation, Alcibiades first replies on that score and, in particular, defends his almost regal action in entering seven chariots in the Olympic races the year before. Such magnifi-

²⁶ VI 15. 2.

²⁷ II 13.

cence, he says, increases the whole city's reputation for wealth and power. Moreover, he goes on with truly staggering aplomb, his superior status could not logically be resented by the ordinary man, who in turn thinks himself superior to the unfortunate. "But either he [i.e. the ordinary man] must submit to being looked down on by those in high prosperity or else claim equal treatment by in turn granting it."²⁸ After this arrogant start, Alcibiades goes on to restate his faith in the wisdom of the expedition. His reasons are two: first, that the Sicilian cities, being made up of discordant elements from old Greece, were ripe for revolution and conquest, and, second, that Athens owed her greatness to a policy of expansion and could not stop now.

As for the first point, the view that Sicily would be an easy prey was, to 'Thucydides' mind, clearly wrong. Not only, as we have seen, was there a latent sense of solidarity throughout the island, but, as events proved, Syracuse became more, rather than less, united in the crisis. Thus, when the news of the expedition was presently announced at Syracuse, Thucydides gives a debate between Hermocrates and the populist Athenagoras in which the former states the need of putting the city immediately on a war footing and of taking every step to rouse the rest of Sicily to the common danger, whereas Athenagoras scouts the idea of danger and, what is more important, represents any effective preparedness in Syracuse as merely an effort by the oligarchs to destroy democracy.²⁹ But it is significant that Hermocrates wins out. The people accepted the imminence of the danger

²⁸ VI 16. 4.

²⁹ VI 38.

and, during the first winter, went so far as to reduce the peacetime board of fifteen generals to three men vested with absolute control. So far was the democracy of Syracuse from being as divided as Alcibiades here represents it. As for the second point, that Athens must continue constantly to expand because she had expanded in the past, it is of course a restatement of the old doctrine of *πολυπραγμοσύνη* and, as such, harks back to the initial picture of Athenian energy and vigor given in the first book. How fully Alcibiades could still rely on these same qualities appears from the fact that, in spite of the resistance at Syracuse and in spite of Nicias' bad leadership, the expedition came within an inch of succeeding. Nevertheless, not only does his argument here represent the supreme denial of Pericles' original policy; it also rests on the new and dangerous state of mind illustrated in the Melian Dialogue. So much appears from Alcibiades' crowning statement, "We cannot in any way limit how far we will extend our power but, being in the position that we are, must inevitably plot to obtain new subjects, while keeping those that we have."³⁰ Pericles in his last speech had described the harsh commitments resulting from the fact of power, and it is no doubt true that so creative a people as the Athenians could by their nature hardly submit to so tame and negative a policy as that of Nicias. But to argue, as Thucydides has argued from the first, that Athens was vastly more fitted for power than any state in Greece was not to argue that any and every attempt to gain such power was either justifiable or wise. The tragic fact of the *History* is that

³⁰ VI 18. 3.

it shows a great and promising people fail of their political mission, and thereby leave their civilization lastingly divided, because they wished to fulfil it brutally and at once.

Nicias had talked disparagingly of Alcibiades' youth and had mentioned the fact, abundantly confirmed by Euripides,³¹ that the old and young were now admittedly at odds, with the young favoring the radical policies of Alcibiades. Unlike Nicias, who was a product of the Periclean age, he was of the generation that had grown up during the war, and his peculiar weaknesses are in part to be explained by that fact. He concludes now by identifying his own generation with the old Athenian will to do and by appealing for a united effort which would repeat in the present Athens' greatest conquests of the past. The people after hearing him, says Thucydides, became even more favorable to the expedition, and it was then that Nicias took the fatal step mentioned earlier of trying to deter them by recommending a considerable increase in the proposed force. When pressed, he committed himself for a hundred triremes and five thousand hoplites, with transports, cavalry, and light-armed troops in proportion. But even this was voted. It was felt, Thucydides says, that so great an expedition could not be seriously harmed, and all were eager to participate in its gains, particularly the permanent gains which would still further increase the public employment of all Athenians. "In view of this extreme popular desire," concludes Thucydides, "whoever was opposed kept quiet, lest by voting in the negative he appear un-

³¹ *Suppliants* 232, *Heracles* 257.

patriotic.”³² Thucydides is virtually repeating here what he had said after Pylos, when the opportunity for peace had been refused that might have prevented the whole vicious cycle from unrolling, but the appetite and blindness that were costly then were to be far more so now.

At this crucial moment, when the expedition had been decided on, there occurred the first of the two minor, half-accidental events which were to prove the immediate cause of the whole great disaster: namely, the desecration of the Hermae. On a certain night, young men “flown with insolence and wine” (as Milton in *Paradise Lost* translates the passage) defaced a number of the quadrangular posts topped with the head of the god which were commonly to be found in front of houses and shrines throughout the city. In the uproar that followed, other impieties were brought to light, notably mock performances of the Eleusinian mysteries in which Alcibiades was alleged to have taken part. The rationalist Thucydides is hardly at his best in recreating the popular religion of the time, though even he alludes to the great number of oracles and prophecies that were in circulation and to the violent anger which later flamed out against soothsayers after the failure at Syracuse.³³ Plutarch gives a better picture when he tells of Nicias’ elaborate piety in propitiating Apollo at Delos after the plague and of the private seer whom he kept in his employ.³⁴ One may recall the trials of Anaxagoras and Socrates in this connection and, by contrast, the fact

³² VI 24. 4.

³³ Cf. esp. II 8. 2, 17, 54, V 26. 4, VIII 1.

³⁴ *Nicias* 3 and 23.

that almost everyone of Sophocles' extant plays involves the fulfilment of some prophecy. It is clear, in any case, that there were wells of superstition among the people which politicians could always draw on, and, like Cleon in Aristophanes' *Knights*,³⁵ the enemies of Alcibiades now did so freely.

There was also another factor in the situation: that the present outrages were supposed to be the work of educated young reactionaries, members of the pro-Spartan oligarchic clubs, which had grown in power as Athens fell more and more into the hands of the extreme democrats. Alcibiades' enemies could allege that he, being rich and well-born, was connected with these anti-democratic clubs. It was recalled, says Thucydides, who now gives a long digression on the subject,³⁶ that the Alcmaeonidae had once before received help from Sparta when they ousted the tyrants, and though this parallel hardly held, since it was claimed that Alcibiades himself now aimed at a tyranny, still the fear of collusion with Sparta on the part of aristocrats was widely felt. Alcibiades' wealth and ambition, his imperiousness and egotism — the whole impression of him which Thucydides sums up in the word *παρανομία*, the state of being beyond ordinary standards³⁷ — were enough to make him suspect when the people were aroused, even as before these same qualities had seemed to augur well for the expedition. The upshot was that he was accused even before the expedition left, though sensing his popularity with the army, his opponents did not press

³⁵ Esp. the scene 997–1110.

³⁶ VI 54–59.

³⁷ VI 15. 4.

their charges. Then, after he was safely gone and after a rumor had spread that some Spartans gathering at the Isthmus were there for the purpose of supporting a revolution in Athens, he was formally indicted and summoned back from Sicily.

It will be remembered that, in the passage on Pericles' successors in the second book, Thucydides called this act the supreme instance of the chaos into which Athens had fallen, and in the present book he speaks of Alcibiades' own reckless life as the cause of it and thereby of Athens' ruin.³⁸ The emphasis of the two passages is slightly different. In the former, Thucydides was concerned with the power of lesser politicians to undermine in the assembly a duly elected, critically important official and thus to lame the state at a vital point. In the present passage, he is thinking of the traits in Alcibiades which gave them that power. But both remarks merely reveal facets of the same condition, an instability and violence, bred of the dislocations of a prolonged war, which split the city into hostile, self-concerned groups and robbed the individual of his forebears' sense of balance. Had any element in the situation been lacking — Alcibiades' intemperance of character, the growth of political jockeying in the degenerate democracy of the time, the rise of anti-democratic forces, or the support which faction found among the confused and undisciplined populace — the result might have been averted. As it was, rather than face possible death at home, Alcibiades slipped away from the officials who had been sent out to bring him back and with quite characteristic in-

³⁸ II 65. 11, VI 15.

souciance deserted to Sparta. Thus, at one stroke, Athens not only gave the enemy a brilliant adviser but herself lost her one really gifted leader of the period. Whose the chief fault was, is difficult to say. One can only say that the conditions pictured in the chapter on revolutions had now begun to obtain in Athens.

It was thus under the ill-omened shadow of impiety that the expedition sailed. Nevertheless, the people rose, as always, with wonderful enthusiasm to the great event. There is no more splendid passage in the *History* than that which relates how, when the whole city had flocked to the Piraeus and farewells had been taken, a trumpet called for silence while prayers were said and libations poured out from gold and silver bowls; then how the paean rose and, forming into line, the triremes one after another raced as far as Aegina.³⁹ One is reminded of Pindar's great ode written after Salamis in which with mystic elation the poet sees something half-divine in the flash and brilliance of racing oars.⁴⁰ But Thucydides is concerned with the fatefulness as well as the magnificence of the present moment. The total force even exceeded Nicias' demands. It has been estimated at over twenty-five thousand men, and though composed in part of allied contingents, nevertheless with the sixty ships (perhaps nine thousand men) and twelve hundred hoplites sent out two years later, was to surpass all efforts undertaken even before the plague, when the power of Athens had been at its height. Thucydides lays no less weight on the fine condition of the ships, the high pay of the sailors, and the general elaborateness of the whole

³⁹ VI 30-31.

⁴⁰ *Isth.* V.

undertaking, and from a financial point of view it was no doubt even more impressive than from that of mere numbers. Thus the passage looks back to all that had been said of the magnitude of the war, the power of Athens, and the surprise felt by the Greek world at its full revelation. Indeed, these themes continue through the whole Sicilian narrative, confirming to the end the crowning judgment in the chapter on Pericles' successors, "such abundant justification did he have at the start when he prophesied an easy victory over the Peloponnesians alone."⁴¹ But when Thucydides concludes by saying that the expedition involved not only the greatest distances ever to have been crossed by a Greek aggressor but the greatest hopes of conquest ever to have been entertained, he reverts also to what he had said of Athens' errors. The mind is prepared now for the tremendous description of the final defeat in the harbor of Syracuse. Taken together, these two passages in fact supremely symbolize the burden of the *History*, the strength and the weakness of democratic Athens.

The aims of the expedition had been only vaguely defined in the assembly, and that fact was to cost the Athenians heavily, in that it left room for dispute among the generals.⁴² One object, though a trifling one for so great a force, was to support Egesta in its local quarrel with Selinus, and Nicias characteristically favored doing simply that and returning home. A wider object, however, remained over from the earlier intervention of 427: namely, to rouse and unite all the non-Doric states of the west against the Dorian cities headed by Syracuse. Fur-

⁴¹ II 65. 13.

⁴² VI 47-49.

ther support could be had from the Pre-Greek inhabitants of interior Sicily, the so-called Sicels long hostile to Syracuse, as well as from the Etruscans and Carthaginians. Alcibiades, with his passion for diplomacy, favored this course, and he was seconded by Lamachus, who, however, would have preferred attacking Syracuse at once while it was still unprepared. Alcibiades' plan was accepted, but the Athenians met their first disappointment when even the states hostile to Syracuse prudently remained neutral, watching how the tide would turn. How greatly Athens was feared is evident from a debate which Thucydides presently records between envoys of Athens and of Syracuse at Camarina,⁴³ one of the states which in 427 had formally appealed for Athenian help. Now the huge size of the expedition made Athens' designs suspect, and though the Athenian speaker makes an extraordinarily cool and cynical argument to the effect that it was to Athens' advantage to strengthen her allies in Sicily, even as it was to her advantage to keep them weak and subservient in Greece, he made no headway. Camarina, in spite of her considerable fear of Syracuse, preferred not to risk bringing in a still stronger master. The Sicels and Etruscans alone welcomed the expedition warmly, and, as Sparta was soon to buy victory in the Aegean by bringing the Persians back, so Athens now found herself siding with the traditional enemies of Greek culture in the west.

To be sure, the fleet, after being refused entry at a number of Italian cities, was finally received at Rhegium, long an ally of Athens. From there it made its

⁴³ VI 76-87.

way to Catana on the east coast of Sicily, to which entrance was gained by force. Now a few ships were sent ahead to spy out the harbor of Syracuse, and, had Alcibiades remained in office, an attack would presumably have followed. At least, his diplomatic maneuvers had failed, and attack was now the only course. There can be little doubt that it would have had a good chance of succeeding. As Thucydides reiterates, the scale and boldness of the expedition had an almost paralyzing effect on Sicily, which wore off only as the Athenians delayed. Had even a partial success been gained now, it is hard to believe that Sparta's later help could have come in time or that some Sicilian cities would have failed to decide in Athens' favor. As it was, just at this moment when the fleet had gathered at Catana, the blow fell. Alcibiades was recalled to face a trial in Athens,⁴⁴ and Nicias, whose influence clearly outweighed that of Lamachus, was left with the deciding voice. He reverted to his previous plan; put off the attack; sailed for western Sicily; and wasted the summer in achieving a few successes quite unworthy of the forces at his command. Had he, as he wished, then sailed for home, disaster would at least have been averted. But whether Lamachus checked him or whether he faltered now, as later, at the idea of facing the angry demos with nothing accomplished, he in any case returned to Catana. An unexpected sally into the harbor of Syracuse resulted in a fairly considerable victory. But only a great victory would by then have justified settling down before Syracuse for the winter. The Athenians retired to the coast,

⁴⁴ VI 53.

and the year supremely opportune for conquest was over.

Meanwhile Alcibiades had eluded his captors and made his way to Sparta, where he arrived, Thucydides says, at the same time as certain envoys from Syracuse bringing urgent demands for help. All spoke before the Spartan assembly, and the historian records Alcibiades' speech which, like every act of this daemonic man, was to be of critical importance. No other speech in the *History* faintly resembles it. In the chapter on revolutions Thucydides had spoken of the change of values and even of the normal meaning of words in wartime,⁴⁵ and, interspersed among many just criticisms of Athens and among advice which was to be of immense, perhaps decisive, value to her foes, there exist in this speech exactly that warping of words and blindness to accepted standards. As the great description of the departure of the fleet had brought to a climax all that the historian had said of Athens' enormous inherent strength, so this speech, even more than the Melian Dialogue, consummates his judgment on her inner decay.

Alcibiades begins by making the same distinction that had been made in the chapter on Pericles' successors between a democracy representative of the whole people and one conducted in the exclusive interest of the masses. The Alcmaeonids, he says, had always stood for the former kind of democracy, but it was the latter which was now in force in Athens and of which he himself was the victim.⁴⁶ He, in short, takes the position of the Old Oligarch, who, it will be remembered, represents democ-

⁴⁵ III 82. 4.

⁴⁶ VI 89. 6.

racy as inevitably reflecting the most ignorant elements in the state — the position which Pericles had denied in his lofty analysis of free government in the Funeral Oration. But insofar as the masses had long clamored for the gains of conquest and insofar as Alcibiades for his own purposes had continuously supported those aims since the Peace of Nicias, he was himself partly responsible for the condition that he was criticizing. Certainly these strictures come with a poor grace from him. Nevertheless they are valid. As was said, Thucydides regarded the recall of Alcibiades as a critical point in the decay of Athenian democracy, and, when he himself here attributes his recall to the class struggle which tore asunder the united democracy of Pericles, he touches once more the root of Athens' defeat. The city's strength, the product of her democracy, came to nothing because, under the pressure of war and suffering, the democracy fell apart into hostile groups.

Alcibiades now goes on to tell of Athens' aims in Sicily and to advise the Spartans how to counter them. It was planned, he says, to conquer Sicily entire, then to attack Italy and Carthage, and finally to use the immense resources thus gained for a conquest of the Peloponnesus which would leave Athens mistress of all the Greek world.⁴⁷ How far he is purposely exaggerating is hard to tell, but there seems no doubt that he comes nearer telling the truth than the Athenian envoy at Camarina who said that Athens was merely interested in strengthening the Ionic over the Doric peoples in Sicily. The latter statement was presumably a deliberate lie de-

⁴⁷ VI 90.

signed to lull the Sicilians until Athens was in a position to do what she wished. Thucydides leaves no doubt that the Athenian people expected a large increase in the empire, and the plan of cutting off the Peloponnesus was adumbrated even in the first expedition to Sicily. Whether, granted a victory at Syracuse, Athens would have been able to hold down so great an area, is another question. But Thucydides makes an interesting remark to the effect that the subject-allies were glad to take part in the expedition because they thought that an extension of the empire would ease their own position.⁴⁸ Had Athens been victorious, she might therefore have associated her original subjects with herself to control her later subjects, even as Rome granted increasing rights to the Latins as her conquests widened.

But however that may be, Alcibiades now advised two measures to counteract these grandiose schemes: first, the prompt dispatch of reinforcements to Syracuse and, second, the establishment of a permanent garrison in Attica. Thucydides says that the Spartans had already considered these steps, especially the first one, but had characteristically delayed taking action. But Alcibiades' advice was sufficient, and insofar as these measures proved turning points in the war, he himself, an Alcmaeonid and a kinsman of Pericles, can be called the chief architect of his country's doom. And as if in prescience of the fact, he ends with a most extraordinary apology for his conduct. "I trust," he says, "that I shall not seem base to you if, patriotic as I was once thought to be, I now vigorously support the enemy in attacking

⁴⁸ VI 69. 3.

my country. . . . Love of country consists to me not in suffering injustice but in the secure status that I once had. I consider that it is no longer my country that I am attacking but that I am trying rather to recover one that has ceased to exist. The true patriot is not the man who, after losing his country unjustly, does nothing, but who loves it and seeks in every way to get it back.”⁴⁹ Pericles had been called patriotic as well as farsighted and the term as applied to him has meaning. But this twisting of the word “patriotism” to suit the exigencies of betrayal and, potentially, of civil war strips it of all its old significance. The distortion reflects the distorted times and shows that Alcibiades was as much their product as their victim.

The second season of the Sicilian war, 414, saw the Athenians' effort pass its peak. Nevertheless, it began well, and, had they acted with equal vigor the year before, they would almost certainly have been successful. Strengthened by funds, cavalry, and bowmen from home, Nicias and Lamachus now boldly attempted the formidable task of cutting off Syracuse from the mainland by means of a long double wall. The topography of the city was and is as follows: it lies on the sea at the end of a broad promontory the southernmost corner of which (Ortygia, originally an island but then connected with the rest of the city by a causeway) juts far downward narrowing and protecting the entrance to the great harbor. As the promontory stretches back from the city towards the mainland, the ground rises to form an elevation, then called Epipolae or highland. On the south,

⁴⁹ VI 92. 2-3.

this elevation drops sharply to the edge of the harbor; towards the east, one could look back from it over the newer parts of the city, the heavily fortified district of Achradina; to the north, one looked up the coast towards Catana and the nearer town of Leon. It was from this town of Leon that the Athenians in early summer ascended the heights of Epipolae and, after surprising the enemy and building a circular fort at the center of the heights, began their walling operations. The Syracusans countered by attempting two successive intercepting walls south of the circular fort towards the harbor, but unsuccessfully. The Athenians virtually completed the southern half of their wall and then proceeded to bring their fleet from Leon into the great harbor. But in the engagement at the second of the intercepting walls Lamachus was killed. On that occasion Thucydides also mentions for the first time the ominous fact that Nicias was ill and out of the battle with a disease of the kidneys.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the position of Syracuse appeared to be hopeless, and submission was being talked of in the city.

It was at this point that Nicias made the second, though not the last, of his famous mistakes, when he failed to dispatch a part of his vastly superior fleet to intercept the nineteen Peloponnesian ships which had been sent out under the Spartan Gylippus at Alcibiades' urgent advice of the previous winter. The captain of one of these ships made a bold dash for Syracuse and arrived there, Thucydides says, on the very day that the question of an armistice was to have been debated in the

⁵⁰ VI 102. 2.

assembly.⁵¹ Gylippus in the meantime reached Himera on the northern coast and, after collecting considerable forces from the local allies of Syracuse, made his way overland to the city. When he in turn mounted the heights of Epipolae, the stones for the northern half of the Athenian wall were for the most part, Thucydides says, already in place. "So narrowly," he adds, "did Syracuse escape danger."⁵² Gylippus fought his way into the city and then encouraged the Syracusans to attempt one final intercepting wall, this time to the north of the circular fort. This last attempt was successful, and in the battle near the point where the two walls met, the Athenians suffered their first major defeat. The hope of investing the city was gone, and now that the Syracusans had access to their many allies throughout the island, the Athenians were themselves in danger of being encircled. If Nicias had urged returning home the year before, he had infinitely more reason to do so now. But he hesitated again, and the next year was to take his last chance from him.

Nicias' fear of the Athenian demos was noted earlier, a fear which appears to have sprung in part from his own character but which also illuminates his hard position as a Periclean moderate in the Athens of these years. Certainly he must often have reflected on the savage punishment meted out a decade earlier to the generals who had returned empty-handed from the first Sicilian expedition. On the other hand, he had opposed the present expedition from the start and was now ill. His plight is pathetically reflected in a message reported by Thucydi-

⁵¹ VII 2. 1.

⁵² VII 2. 4.

des which he dispatched to the assembly in the autumn of the current year.⁵³ He begins by retracing the events just noted and by saying that, so far as land-operations were concerned, the Athenians were now no longer in the position of the besiegers but of the besieged. But the burden of his message concerns the degeneration of the fleet. The high pay by which sailors had been attracted to the expedition and the widespread belief in the huge loot to be had in Sicily were observed earlier. Now, says Nicias, many slaves and allies who had been lured by these gaudy prospects were deserting; the ships needed overhauling after constant use; and even Athenian crews were getting out of hand. "Your temperaments," he adds almost with a sigh, "are hard to discipline." He goes on to apologize for the bad news and to ask consideration for himself because of his former services. Then he asks to be relieved of his command by reason of ill-health and says that, if the expedition is not to be recalled, reinforcements equal in size to the original force would be needed. The whole impression left by the letter could hardly be worse, not only or primarily because of what it tells of Nicias' state of mind, but because of the utter lack of contact which it reveals between the army and the Athenian people. During the next summer, while there was still opportunity to escape, Nicias refused to give the command for fear of what members of the army, then desperate to be home, would say when they got there.⁵⁴ Thucydides had spoken of the ignorance about Sicily that prevailed in Athens and had bitterly criticized the suicidal recall of Alcibiades.

⁵³ VII 11-15.

⁵⁴ VII 48. 4.

But this condition whereby a general in the field never escaped the specter of abuse, prejudice, and ignorance at home comes near being the *reductio ad absurdum* of popular government. It was at least a condition whereby popular government defeated itself by militating against its own best interest.

Yet the Athenians responded with amazing and characteristic vitality even to these demands, raising very largely from the city itself a new force of seventy-three ships and fifteen hundred hoplites, light-armed troops, and all necessary equipment. Without relieving Nicias of his command, they also named two generals to act with him, Eurymedon and Demosthenes, the latter of whom was to wait in Athens until the spring of 413, when the new force would be ready. This great effort, moreover, was not undertaken while Athens itself was undisturbed. For in the spring of 413, breaking at last the state of undeclared war, the Spartans not only invaded Attica again after twelve years but, as Alcibiades had advised, established at Decelea on the slopes of Mt. Parnes a permanent garrison to raid and despoil the country winter and summer. In speaking of the immense blow which this step was to prove, Thucydides rises to his last great statement of the strength of his native city. At the start of the war, he says, some had given the Athenians one year, others two years, none more than three years, if the Peloponnesians invaded; then in the seventeenth year of war, they had undertaken to besiege a city as large as Athens itself; and now they were persisting in this effort, though virtually under siege themselves. "Such was the unforeseen display

(παράλογος) of power and courage which they gave to the Greek world.”⁵⁵ The passage evokes all that had been said in the first books of the vitalizing force of democracy as an institution, of the great economic advances made by the liberated Athenian people, of the blindness of the outmoded oligarchic states of Greece, and of Pericles’ foresight in estimating the possibilities in store for his country. But now, through political disunion and error, these possibilities had largely vanished and the Athenians were to experience at the hands of democratic Syracuse the sense of shocked surprise (παράλογος) that they had formerly inflicted on others.

Thucydides’ statement to that effect is specific. “Only,” he says with special reference to Syracuse, “when they attacked these cities which were similar in outlook to their own (ὁμοίότροποι), which, like it, had a democratic form of government, and which were . . . of some magnitude,” could they make no headway either by revolution or by force.⁵⁶ Nicias in an earlier speech had spoken in the same way of the similarity of the great Sicilian cities to Athens.⁵⁷ On the other hand, even in the eighth book, after the failure of the expedition, Thucydides continues to emphasize the slowness and incapacity which made Sparta by herself to the last an easy adversary. All these statements simply reinforce the fact that he was incapable of conceiving a great progressive city except as a democracy. His insistence at the outset on the progress of Greece in his times is therefore a tribute to the effect of free institutions, and however clearly he also saw Athens’ weaknesses, never-

⁵⁵ VII 28. 3.

⁵⁶ VII 55. 2.

⁵⁷ VI 20. 3.

theless, unlike Plato or Aristotle, he never forgot what Greece owed to democracy.

By the time that Demosthenes reached Syracuse with his reinforcements in the early summer of 413, Nicias had already met two more defeats, which were the graver because both affected the fleet. One was the loss of Plemmyrium, the point of land jutting out opposite Ortygia at the mouth of the harbor which had been used as a point of debarkation and storage for supplies. Its capture meant not only the loss of these materials but that all incoming ships had henceforth to be escorted, often with difficulty, past the mouth of the harbor to the Athenian camp on the farther shore. The second defeat was still more serious. The Athenians' traditional superiority at sea had hitherto rested on the skill of long experience whereby their crews were able to maneuver so quickly that they could commonly take enemy ships off their guard and ram them from the side before they had turned. These maneuvers demanded space as well as ships designed for speed. Now there was invented at Corinth and perfected at Syracuse a new type of ship with heavily reinforced prow which could not be rammed head-on but, on the contrary, was itself deadly from that direction.⁵⁸ These ships were designed for use in a relatively narrow space such as the harbor of Syracuse, where the enemy could not maneuver, and were also large enough to carry considerable numbers of bowmen and slingers. It was ships of this type which won the Syracusans their second victory. They rammed and sank seven Athenian vessels, inflicted heavy casualties from

⁵⁸ VII 34.

missiles cast at close range, and chased the Athenian fleet to its stockaded harborage at the inner shore of the bay. Thucydides had so far repeatedly portrayed the struggle between Athens and Syracuse as one between knowledge and experience on the one hand and mere courage on the other, and there can be no doubt that, though the Athenian force, like all contemporary forces, was made up of citizen levies, it had acquired through years of fighting almost a professional character. Now the enemy had made up his deficiencies, and, like the Spartan hoplites on Sphacteria twelve years before, the Athenians found themselves in the bitter position of being worsted in a branch of fighting in which they had never for a moment questioned their superiority. The fact reveals again what Thucydides had said of the creative vigor of the Syracusans.

With the arrival of Demosthenes, the last remorseless act of the tragedy began. The appearance of strong Athenian reinforcements vastly impressed the defenders of Syracuse, who now saw no end to their toils, and Demosthenes was for striking at once while this impression was at its height. His plan was to attack the intercepting wall on Epipolae by which the Syracusans had saved themselves the year before and, if he should succeed, to settle down again to investing the city. If he should fail, he urged returning to Athens immediately while the way was still open. He chose for purposes of concealment to make the great attempt at night, and one of Thucydides' finest descriptions is of the eerie battle that followed in the moonlight on the heights above the city, when it was hard to tell friend from foe

and the cries of isolated and bewildered fighters filled the air.⁵⁹ The Athenians had the first advantage but, in attempting to press it home, became dispersed, a fatal predicament because of the darkness and because the Syracusans, with a shorter distance to cross, kept together as they sallied in increasing numbers from the city wall. Then, while the center and rear were still advancing, the Athenian front broke, and utter confusion followed as the whole army, in large part new to the terrain, struggled back down the cliffs from Epipolae to the shore. The moral advantage that Demosthenes had brought with him was more than lost, and he was for quitting Syracuse at once.

But Nicias demurred. It is here that he expressed his previously mentioned fear of what the soldiers would say of him when they reached Athens.⁶⁰ He also professed to believe that a revolutionary party in Syracuse was gaining ground and spoke further of the ill effect on the army if retreat were openly discussed in a council of officers. But whatever his reasons, he refused to leave. Then, within a few days, two crowning events followed. The first was the arrival by way of Africa of strong Peloponnesian forces which convinced even Nicias that his position at Syracuse was hopeless. The second was an accident which for sheer fatality surpassed even the desecration of the Hermae — the famous eclipse of the moon of the evening of the twenty-seventh of August, 413. Such celestial signs were normally taken as unfavorable, and the soothsayers who surrounded the pious Nicias went so far as to forbid his considering action for

⁵⁹ VII 43-44.

⁶⁰ VII 48. 4.

a period of "thrice nine days," that is, a complete lunar month. "He was," Thucydides adds with some restraint, "excessively given to divination and similar practices."⁶¹ He waited, and the last chance of escape passed.

The reason why it passed was that the Athenians had lost command of the harbor. Demosthenes' fresh ships, to be sure, had not as yet been brought into action against the heavy Syracusan vessels, but when they were, a few days later, the result was the same. Eighteen were sunk; the second of the two new generals, Eurymedon, was killed; and the Syracusans, pressing for annihilation, proceeded to block the mouth of the harbor with anchored hulks. Decisively worsted on both land and sea, the Athenians had no hope left except in a desperate effort to break the circle that surrounded them. They resolved to make this effort by sea, and perhaps the supreme sign of their changed position is to be found in the account of how they, the Athenians, whose every policy had been based on control of the sea and who had for decades maintained that control by their unrivalled skill as sailors, now simply crowded every available fighting man on the decks in the hope of battering their way out. To such a plight had the chaos of democracy at home brought them.

Fine as many of Thucydides' descriptions are, none equals that which now follows. Indeed, it is more than a description but, in some sense, a drawing together of all the great themes of the *History*: the magnitude of the

⁶¹ VII 50. 4. It is interesting that the majority of the soldiers are said to have shared Nicias' dread of the eclipse, a further indication of how he, unlike Pericles (II 65. 9), failed at times to oppose the people.

war, of which this battle was the climax; its effect on the Greek world, here emphasized by a formal catalogue of all the peoples of old and new Greece that were at grips;⁶² the power of the great democratic rivals Athens and Syracuse; Athens' previous hopes of total victory; her unheard-of efforts; and now her defeat, the result of her own errors. As commonly at such times, Thucydides gives speeches on each side: the one by Nicias who, in tones reminiscent of the Funeral Oration, reminds his hearers of the privileges of Attic life that hung in the balance;⁶³ the other by the Spartan Gylippus, who calmly describes the enemy's prospective tactics and suggests how they, and with them the long-standing menace of Athenian aggression, could be overcome. Thucydides goes on with curious poignancy to tell how Nicias, thinking all that he had said still insufficient, went up to his officers one by one, reminding them again of home and freedom and "saying all those things which people normally say at such moments when they are not afraid of seeming trite — the appeals to wives, children, and ancestral gods which are virtually the same on every occasion but which men utter in present anguish because they appear helpful."⁶⁴ The sympathy which here breaks through Thucydides' normal reserve suffuses the whole present narrative, making clear again that his work is more than a brilliant record of important events but one which, like all great works of art, sprang from the depths of his own experience.

The Athenians mustered for the great struggle some one hundred and ten ships loaded with infantry and

⁶² VII 57-58.

⁶³ Esp. VII 63. 4-64.

⁶⁴ VII 69. 2.

fitted with grappling irons for close encounter, against some seventy-six of the enemy, exclusive of the ships anchored at the barrier. As this great mass of vessels became locked together, the fighting was indescribably confused.⁶⁵ Ships would bear down on one another in a shower of javelins, stones, and arrows; then grapple; and, while fighting, would often be attacked by other ships from a fresh quarter. The din of collisions, the crash of missiles, and the shouts of fighters made it almost impossible to hear commands. On the shore the remainder of both forces, drawn up to protect or capture fugitives, watched paralyzed, and men's faces and cries and even, Thucydides says, their swaying bodies mirrored, often contradictorily, the small part of the varying battle that each chanced to be following. Finally, after a long struggle the Athenians again broke, and from harbor and shore sailors and footmen turned with outcry in a universal dash for the camp.

There is little more to tell. Demosthenes the next day urged a second attempt when the enemy might be off his guard, but the demoralized men refused to touch the ships. Meanwhile, in order to gain time for occupying the near-by passes, Hermocrates, like Themistocles on the eve of Salamis, sent the Athenians a false message warning against immediate flight. The trick worked, and they waited. Then on the third day after the battle, followed by the pleading cries of the sick and wounded

⁶⁵ VII 70-71. There is an interesting tribute to this passage in Gibbon's description of the assault on Constantinople in 1453 (ch. 68, n. 58): "I must confess that I have before my eyes the living picture which Thucydides has drawn of the passions and gestures of the Athenians in a naval engagement in the great harbor of Syracuse."

who were being left behind, the whole army filed out westwards towards the interior, whence the plan was to circle back to the coast at Catana. No less than forty thousand, Thucydides says,⁶⁶ began the march, seemingly an excessive figure in view of the previous losses but one that evidently includes large local contingents, chiefly Sicel and Etruscan. This vast procession, he goes on to say, resembled nothing else than a whole city in flight "and that, no small one." The sense of disgrace, the still-vivid impression of friends left behind, the memory of what the expedition had been at the start, were in all minds. "Nevertheless," he concludes, "in view of the vastness of the danger yet awaiting, even this seemed bearable."

There follows a last speech, the last also in the *History*, by Nicias who, true to himself, finds comfort in the hope of divine help. "The enemy," he says, "has had his share of success, and if our expedition at one time roused the jealousy of any god, we have been punished enough. Others too have attacked their foes and, after doing what men will do, have suffered what men must bear. So we now may reasonably hope for milder treatment at the gods' hands, being worthier of their pity than their jealousy."⁶⁷ One is reminded of the similar hopes expressed by the Melians three years before, hopes which had the same fulfilment then as Nicias' now. The Athenians suffered terribly throughout the retreat for lack of food and from the enemy's harrying tactics. On the third day they found the Syracusans strongly established on a mountain pass and, after vain efforts to dislodge

⁶⁶ VII 75. 5.

⁶⁷ VII 77. 3-4.

them, turned southwards on the night of the fifth day. But in the course of the night, the army became separated, and on the following morning the rear under Demosthenes was cut off and surrounded near the coast some miles south of Syracuse on the road to Helorum. He held out for a few hours in a walled olive orchard, then finally surrendered. The van under Nicias met a more terrible fate two days later in the gorge of the Assinarus river, where the parched and exhausted soldiers had descended to drink. From the cliffs above, the enemy wrought fearful slaughter until Nicias finally made an end by giving himself up.

The captives, says Thucydides, were largely spirited away by private individuals as slaves, and all Sicily became full of them, a few eventually escaping and making their way home.⁶⁸ The rest, to the number of some seven thousand, were herded into the famous stone quarries at Syracuse, where those from the most hated cities, Athens and the Greek cities of the new world, were left to die from disease and exposure. Gylippus would have saved Nicias and Demosthenes, but the Syracusans, rancorous with suffering, demanded their death also. So died, says Thucydides of Nicias, "one who of all the Hellenes of my time least deserved so unhappy an end because his entire conduct had been governed by the principles of virtue."⁶⁹ Such praise may at first sight seem surprising in view of Nicias' obvious deficiencies as both a statesman and a general. On reflection, however, the judgment appears not only just but in keeping with Thucydides' whole thought throughout the *History*. For

⁶⁸ VII 85. 3.

⁶⁹ VII 86. 5.

it emphasizes that, whatever his faults, Nicias had at least that moderation and stability, the lack of which both in Alcibiades and in the Athens of the time was the chief cause of the whole vast disaster. The mind is thus carried back to Pericles, whose stability Nicias alone possessed, and thus also to Pericles' vision of Athens' future and to the steps by which that future had become this bitter present. If it is of the nature of tragedy to evoke the sense of potentialities unfulfilled, then tragedy is to be felt here, even to the closing words of the narrative: "The immensity of this event was without parallel in the present war and, in my opinion, in all that we know of Greek history. It was also of unparalleled glory to the victors and humiliation to the vanquished. For their defeat, utter and universal, was unredeemed by any purely minor loss. Army, fleet, everything perished in total ruin, and of many only few returned home."⁷⁰

From the point of view of Thucydides' thought, it is necessary to add only a brief epilogue. The eighth book, to be sure, carries the story of the war two years further, to the autumn of 411, but this period, like that just after the Peace of Nicias, was to some degree one of readjustment and recuperation, the fruits of which appeared only later. It is sometimes said that the narratives of both these periods — namely, the middle of the fifth book and the eighth book — are unfinished because they lack speeches, but the fact is more easily explained by the nature of the periods themselves. Had Thucydides lived to complete his work, he would no doubt have risen to a

⁷⁰ VII 87. 5-6.

final climax in the events of the last five years of the war, even as he had risen to the Sicilian narrative after the desultory period before it.

In itself the eighth book describes the first steps in the dismemberment of the Athenian empire, telling how one by one Athens' principal possessions in the Aegean, first Chios, then Miletus, then Thasos, then Euboea, were wrested from her by the combined efforts of those unnatural partners, the Spartans, the Persians, and Alcibiades. Thucydides from the first had stressed the greatness of Athens' mission in bringing unity and prosperity to the Aegean, and the alliance between Sparta and Persia is the final sign both of the depths to which Greece had sunk and of the loss which she suffered in the defeat of Athens. Thucydides' account of these events is replete with themes already familiar: notably, the recuperative power of Athens, which was expected to succumb not eight years after Syracuse but immediately,⁷¹ and the slowness of the Spartans which made this recuperation possible.⁷² But he lays chief emphasis, as before, on the old problem of unity within Athens, praising highly both the conservative rule of the ten *πρόβουλοι* or guardians set up in the autumn of 413⁷³ and the so-called government of the Five Thousand which was in force from the autumn of 411 to the summer of 410. He speaks of the latter, as Aristotle does of his own ideal commonwealth, as blending the good features of both oligarchy and democracy and calls it the best government that

⁷¹ VIII 2. 1-2, 24. 5, 106. 5.

⁷² VIII 96. 4-5.

⁷³ VIII 1.

Athens had known in his time.⁷⁴ On the other hand, he vehemently criticizes the brief rule of the extreme oligarchs in 411 as both repressive in itself and destructive of the empire.⁷⁵ Now we know that after Alcibiades' naval victory (he had by then switched back from Sparta to Athens) at Cyzicus in 410 and again after Arginusae in 406, the Athenians were offered peace on the basis of the *status quo* and both times rejected the offer under the influence of the extreme democrats led by Cleophon.⁷⁶ Even at this stage of the war Sparta therefore proved, as Thucydides had constantly said, a halting adversary, and, though these new offers were less advantageous than that which Cleon had refused after Pylos, still their rejection sprang from the same motive, the unwillingness of a popular leader to risk his continued power by making peace.

The double fact, then, that, on the one hand, the extreme oligarchs, in addition to being frankly traitorous, were quite unfitted to control a naval and as such a democratic empire and that, on the other hand, the extreme democrats proved blind to the city's needs and careless of its resources explains Thucydides' praise of the moderate constitution of the Five Thousand. That constitution must have seemed to him a second best, the nearest approach then possible to the vigorous yet united, humane yet expansive, city of Pericles. For it is that city which is constantly before his eyes, the city which he knew in his youth as yoking the creativity of freedom to

⁷⁴ VIII 97. 2. Aristotle, *Politics* VI (IV), 1293b 33.

⁷⁵ Esp. VIII 64-66, 91.

⁷⁶ Diodorus, XIII 52-53. Aristotle, *Const. of Athens* 34.

effective leadership. He believed, and probably rightly, that Athens might have gone on to control yet larger sections of the Greek world, perhaps eventually all of it, and to raise these to the level of her own democratic, commercial economy. Certainly her long and brilliant struggle proved how vastly stronger she originally was than her oligarchic rivals, the relics of an earlier age. But Athens, he thought, failed through the excess of democracy itself, the source of her strength, and the end of the war saw the city captured, the long walls dismantled, the fleet taken over, and oligarchies set up in all parts of the empire that had not been handed back to Persia. It is this difference, when he wrote, between the Athens that once was and the Athens then before him that stung Thucydides to etch the transformation with words of fire.



CHAPTER VII

THE STYLE OF THUCYDIDES

FROM Thucydides' narrative we now turn to his style and, in particular, to the question how far it is representative of the Athens of which he wrote. As was suggested in the second chapter, that question is of some importance for our judgment of the *History*, largely because of the number and importance of the speeches. If we can believe the style of the Funeral Oration, for instance, to be in the main suggestive of that of Pericles himself, then the speech will have a quite different value for us from that which it would have if we consider the style false. To be sure, style is not the sole or perhaps even the chief element in veracity. The outlook, the forms of argumentation, the specific ideas and policies which find expression in the speeches are at least as important in conjuring up the impression of the period. But, for what can be loosely called the content of the speeches, support has already been seen to exist for Thucydides' essential faithfulness. Certainly the number of times that his Athenian speakers, at least, make use of arguments and express ideas known to have been familiar at the time when they actually spoke is most striking. There can be little doubt that, in composing the *History*, Thucydides intensely relived the period on which

the realistic thought of the sophists made its first and deepest impression, and though it could be argued that he himself felt the impact of that thought with special force and therefore possibly overstressed it in his speeches, the very fact that the sophists were themselves symptomatic of a widespread mood and got their fame for that reason does much to confirm his accuracy. In sum, so far as the content of the speeches is concerned, there is no need to repeat what was said earlier of the world in which Thucydides was reared and which he re-created when he composed his work at the end of the war.

In regard to his style, however, the verdict might conceivably be different. The best-known modern critic of ancient oratory, Friedrich Blass, in fact went so far as to say that Pericles' three speeches in the *History* give a true picture of the great statesman's mind but not of his oratory.¹ The reasoning behind that judgment is essentially this: that interest in artistic prose, notably oratorical prose, increased very rapidly during Thucydides' lifetime, that in particular his elaborate antithetical style owed much to the sophist Gorgias who came to Athens only in 427, two years after Pericles' death, that in general the style of the speeches is too complicated to have been used at any time for practical purposes (much less in the early period covered in the first four books), and that consequently we must think of Thucydides' style as something peculiar to himself which is quite false and for the most part quite anachronistic in the mouths of his speakers. Still other rea-

¹ *Die attische Beredsamkeit* ², Leipzig, 1887, I, 34.

sons have been used to support such a belief: notably, that ancient historians as a rule aimed in their speeches at the artistic unity of their works as a whole rather than at reproducing the style of any one speaker — which is to say that in this aspect they were closer to Homer or the tragedians than to modern historical practice.

These are weighty reasons, and, although it will be argued here that the conclusion to which they seem to lead is largely incorrect, still they no doubt embody a measure of truth. That seems particularly the case in respect to the last argument: namely, that ancient historians, Thucydides among them, adopted for their speeches a uniform style maintained throughout the whole work. Certainly Thucydides does not normally characterize his speakers by varying his style or usage, but intellectually, by the attitude and type of reasoning which each expresses. He attributes, to be sure, striking and memorable phrases to some men, notably to Pericles in the Funeral Oration. Again, Cleon's violence in the Mytilenean debate is to some extent reflected in the wild flow of his language, particularly as that is contrasted with Diodotus' measured reasoning. But these examples merely show that at times Thucydides pushed his normal method one step further, mirroring the quality of the speaker's mind in the very structure of his sentences, even as, to take another example, he catches the Spartan brevity of the angry ephor Sthenelaidas in the burning terseness of the latter's speech in the first book. But, for the most part, the rule holds that Thucydides distinguishes between his speakers primarily by the cast of their argument. It is perhaps hardly

necessary to repeat that many of the men whom he brings forward actually spoke in their own local dialect, and his neglect of that fact can stand as a symbol of his whole practice. To judge by Aristophanes, who often uses local dialects, the effect of any such realism might have been distinctly comic. Thus, to return, it will not be argued here that Thucydides was concerned to mirror in his own style the exact accent of his speakers. It will be argued simply that, having received his main or, perhaps better, his sole impressions of politics and political oratory in Athens before his exile in 424, he inevitably retained to the end, in style as well as in thought, the stamp of those formative years.

But before approaching that complicated and (for any larger judgment of the *History*) crucial problem, it is necessary to speak briefly of Thucydides' style in itself. It is usually and rightly considered the exemplar *par excellence* in Greek literature of the so-called antithetical, as opposed to the simple and to the periodic, style. The earliest prose writers in Greek, as in other languages, found neither subordination nor emphasis easy to handle. They wrote for the most part in a series of short independent clauses, the so-called λέξεις εἰρομένη or linear style, and, for purposes of emphasis or connection, often repeated a prominent word from one clause to the next. A sentence of Hecataeus, the predecessor of Herodotus, illustrates both points. "Hecataeus of Miletus speaks thus. I write the following things as they appear to me to be true. For the stories of the Hellenes, as it seems to me, are many and absurd."² His clauses are short; the contrast between the truth

² Fig. 1 (Jacoby).

which he intends to give and the falsehoods which he hears is made in separate statements; in both of these, he repeats the same remark about his own judgment. Herodotus, though his sentences are normally far longer and more elaborate, often follows much the same method, particularly as regards the repetition of words from one sentence to another — for instance, at the beginning of his work, “Argos at this time surpassed all lands in what is now the country of the Hellenes, and when the Phoenicians reached this land of Argos . . . ,”³ etc.

At the other end of the development, both historically and formally, is the periodic style, the λέξις κατεστραμμένη. Aristotle defined the periodic sentence as one which possessed in itself a clear beginning and end, and which was of a size to be comprehended as a whole.⁴ It was this sentence, involving the nice subordination of part to part and the adjustment of all to one major idea, which was perfected in the course of the fourth century by Isocrates and Demosthenes and which, transplanted into Latin by Cicero, passed from him into the cadences of Burke and Gibbon. It is in many ways the final flower of the logical Greek mind, and, if it has a weakness, it is the weakness of all logical, organic things, that the central idea tends to crush the vitality of the separate parts.

Somewhere between these two extremes is the antithetical style of Thucydides, a style which, unlike that of Hecataeus, possesses the strongest possible means of emphasis and contrast within any given sentence, but which, unlike the periodic style, is normally somewhat

³ I 1. 2.

⁴ *Rhetoric* III 9. 3, 1409b 1.

rigid, because it tends to juxtapose rather than to subordinate ideas. Contrast being perhaps the most fundamental and effective means of constating difference, the antithetical style could be called more than anything else the style of clarity, possibly a clarity which squanders itself on detail but which is nevertheless omnipresent and insistent. As we have seen, this desire for balance and contrast was not limited to Thucydides' style alone but appears equally in his paired speeches, in his opposed portrayals of Athens and Sparta, Pericles and Cleon, Nicias and Alcibiades, even in the two great ideas of his *History*, the strength and the weakness of Athens. To modern tastes, such symmetry may seem severe; nevertheless it has a strength and, one could say, a statuesqueness which are to be found not in Thucydides alone but in his whole period. Certainly one finds much the same lucid balance in Sophocles' debates or in the contrasting picture of Oedipus the clear-sighted and great at the start of the play and Oedipus the blind and broken at the end.

But the antithetical differed from the linear style that preceded it not only in structure but in the fact that it was consciously developed as an artistic medium. More will be said presently of this extremely important point, but it is necessary to realize here that prose in its earliest development made slow headway against the overwhelming predominance of verse. It was verse which was the great medium for interpreting the past, analyzing the present, and setting forth generally the rules of life, and it possessed in its usage and vocabulary a grandeur appropriate to this high function. One may recall here

what was said in the second chapter of the importance which accrued to the Greek poet in the community because of the lack of a professional priesthood or a formulated religious doctrine. As late as the middle of the fifth century, the poets were in the fullest sense the guides and instructors of Greece. Under these circumstances, prose long made no pretension to sweep or dignity, whether in its content or in its form. Used originally for the recording of laws and the keeping of records, it only slowly developed wider functions (notably in Ionia in the late sixth century) in philosophy, in geography, and in the rudiments of history. But since even these subjects were largely factual or utilitarian in character, the prose which was their medium, though it gained in suppleness, remained direct and straightforward. As was mentioned earlier, similar writings continued to be produced throughout the fifth century and long after, *ὑπομνήματα*, "notes" or "memoranda," examples of which are to be found in the technical Hippocratic writings and possibly in the more popular tract of the Old Oligarch.⁵ In the *History* itself there is a marked difference in style between the elaborate speeches, analyses, and descriptions, on the one hand, and the purely factual passages about geography, military movements and the like, on the other.⁶ These latter passages likewise illustrate the direct and simple style of the scientific tract. By contemporary standards,

⁵ W. Aly, *Formprobleme der frühen griechischen Prosa* (*Philologus*, Suppl. XXI, Heft III, 1929), p. 62. One might compare the tract of the Old Oligarch to the less technical Hippocratic works such as the *Airs, Waters, Places*.

⁶ W. Aly, *ibid.*, p. 50.

the most remarkable thing about the *History* may well have been that it attempted to combine, as no other work that we know of did, the painstaking manner of these learned writings with the bold and brilliant style of oratory.

For the antithetical style was unquestionably the first style of a consciously artistic oratory, and its development in Athens after the middle of the fifth century must be connected with the subtle but far-reaching change which then began to come over the Greek mind. One of the hardest tasks for us as moderns is to comprehend with any exactitude the outlook of periods which expressed themselves not, as we do, in the conscious logic of prose but in the myths and symbols of verse. We often tend to explain too superficially the predominance of verse in early society, saying merely that it was traditional or that it was associated with song and dance. That is true. Nevertheless when one confronts, for instance, so great a figure as Aeschylus, it is clear that such explanations are not sufficient. One must say that both he and the society for which he wrote found in the great symbols of his plays something which spoke more directly and intimately to their consciousness than logical prose would have done. The whole brilliant development of myth in early Greek literature can be explained only if one assume that myth and story were at the time men's primary means of understanding life — in other words, that these men thought not conceptually, as we do, but in symbols. To take a further example, Homer's stories of the Sirens and the Lotus-eaters, Circe's swine and the descent to the underworld,

are certainly not allegories, since allegory implies the conscious embodiment of an abstraction in human form — for instance, the abstraction “steadfastness” in the form of Mr. Steadfast. They are rather folk tales, the product of unconscious reasoning, which, to be sure, have a profound meaning but which are nevertheless utterly transparent and simple because early man found that meaning in and through the story itself, not in any abstraction from the story.

When, therefore, prose first challenged and then supplanted verse as the main vehicle of higher expression in Greece, the fact signifies a pervasive change in outlook, a change which can perhaps be called the victory of conceptual over symbolic thought. How slow the change was and how nicely the balance was poised for some decades of the later fifth century is suggested by the representative figures of the age: on the one hand, the poets Sophocles and Euripides and, on the other, the rationalists Socrates and Thucydides. But the degree to which Euripides fell short of Sophocles, substituting realism and abstract argument for the latter’s essentially symbolic art, points the way in which the tide was running. Euripides, like Thucydides, had felt the force of sophistic thought, and insofar as the sophists were the main instruments by which this new interest in prose, this new concern for conscious, analytical reasoning expressed itself, then the great tradition of Greek poetry already had in him the seeds of its own destruction. It is no accident that the leading figures of the fourth century were all prose writers. But this merely serves as a background to the rise of artistic prose dur-

ing Thucydides' lifetime. Granted that the change already described was then taking place and that, as a result, men were seeking to convey in prose the characteristic rationalism of the age, then it was natural that prose, even as it was emulating the social function of verse, should have emulated its nobility and grandeur also. The antithetical style represents the first great attempt in Athens to create out of prose a vehicle not merely of exposition but of conscious art. The abstractness of Thucydides' thought, the boldness of his language, his varied but omnipresent symmetry, all testify to how high a medium he felt that prose could be. The antithetical style, as we have seen, was in one sense inspired by the desire for clarity, but it also signifies men's struggle to place on prose that form and shape which would make it capable of the widest possible use.

Clarity and elaboration, then, are the marks of Thucydides' formal as opposed to his factual style — the style, that is, of the speeches and descriptions, as opposed to that of purely informative passages. But because of the scope and boldness of his whole attempt in the *History* to describe for future readers the manifold forces in the war, it may well seem that elaboration commonly won out over clarity. For the very purpose of his work repeatedly drove him to heap up comparison and contrast to such a degree as almost to obliterate the clarity which was at the same time essential to it. The compression of the speeches tended to the same result. Any one of Pericles' speeches, for example, can be read aloud in a few minutes, but, though we have no information on the subject, it is to be presumed that the man himself

would normally have spoken at some length. If so, Thucydides distilled the statesman's words to their quintessence and, by so doing, was forced to yet further abstraction.

The result can be illustrated from almost any speech, but the following passage from the Funeral Oration where Pericles is discussing the difference between Athens and Sparta may suffice. "Yet surely if with light hearts rather than through heavy discipline, less by force of law than out of native courage, we willingly undergo dangers, ours is the gain that we do not faint beforehand at ills to come but, being in them, prove ourselves no less bold than those who forever train, and that herein our city is worthy of admiration and in yet other ways."⁷ The passage evokes much of what Thucydides had previously said throughout the first book concerning the differences between Athens and Sparta, in laws, in outlook, in way of life, in military performance. The elaborate series of contrasting clauses, each varied in form and one in reversed order, accordingly illustrates the two objectives of the style just mentioned: the desire to fix each specific contrast with utmost precision but, at the same time, to impart to the whole complex of ideas a scope and dignity appropriate to the subject itself. This latter desire for elaboration dictates in turn the rhythms and responsions of the passage (marked in Greek), the use of abstract words (which were felt to have an elevated, even a poetic, character), also the changes in construction and order which soften an otherwise too rigid symmetry. The power of the passage lies

⁷ II 39. 4.

in the fact that every part of it is in the most delicate and exact focus and that the whole is therefore an aggregate, so to speak, of intensely luminous facets. Its weakness follows from the same fact, since the parts are so striking that together they fail to comprise, like Aristotle's ideal sentence, an easily grasped whole. The comparative insecurity of the whole as against the parts is strikingly illustrated by the last clause of the passage, "and that herein our city is worthy of admiration and in yet other ways." Editors have pointed out that the clause should logically form a new sentence leading on to the next paragraph, and certainly it has no necessary connection with the main statement, "ours is the gain," on which nevertheless it grammatically depends. But it would be wrong to emend the passage, since Thucydides not uncommonly makes such lapses in construction. The fact merely emphasizes what was just stated: that the antithetical style was, by its nature, more capable of dealing with the parts of a sentence than of uniting them in a satisfactory whole. Absorption with detail is usually taken to be a mark of archaism, and Thucydides' style is no doubt in this respect archaic, as we have already seen it to be in the respect that, historically, it represents the first attempt to achieve an artistic prose. But like most archaic things, it has an intensity and a vividness which were hardly matched by the more organic productions of a later age.

A few more remarks on his style, and we shall return to the question of its historicity. It has already been suggested that Thucydides' diction was highly, by Greek standards enormously, abstract. Various reasons

tended to make it so: the compression of the speeches, the elevation that attached to abstract words, their greater usefulness for purposes of contrast, and the fact that he was as much concerned with the social and psychological forces behind the war as with the actual war itself. In any case, his pages are studded both with general nouns and, more characteristic still, with infinitives, neuter adjectives and neuter participles doing service for nouns. A previously quoted passage from the speech of the Corinthians against the alliance between Corcyra and Athens will illustrate the point. "Advantage most accrues where least offense is given. The prospect of war with which they are frightening you into an act of aggression against us lies still in uncertainty. It is not therefore worth your while to take on an open and actual enmity with Corinth but, on the contrary, to quiet the suspicions long existent between us. A final kindness done at an opportune time, though small, can cancel a great score. Nor should you be attracted by their offer of a naval alliance. Care not to injure one's equals is a far firmer [basis of] power than any dangerous eminence got by pressing every temporary advantage."⁸

The passage has been chosen, rather than the famous analysis of the revolutionary mind⁹ or the contrast in the first book between the Athenian and Spartan outlooks,¹⁰ because, though these latter passages reveal Thucydides' generalizing manner at its height, the present passage is perhaps more representative. One observes at the start that it contains three general statements. In

⁸ I 42. 2-4.⁹ III 82.¹⁰ I 70.

the first of these ("advantage most accrues where least offense is given"), the subject is a neuter participle, τὸ ξυμφέρων; in the second ("a final kindness done at an opportune time, though small, can cancel a great score") the subject is the noun χάρις; in the third ("care not to injure one's equals is a far firmer power"), the subject is an infinitive. This variation illustrates Thucydides' previously mentioned care to soften the prevailing symmetry of his style.¹¹ More important, however, is the effect produced by these abstractions. As was just remarked, Thucydides was expressly concerned to analyze those forces behind the events of his time which he felt were lodged in human nature and would therefore recur indefinitely. It was argued earlier that, so far as these forces find expression in the speeches (which are certainly their chief avenue of expression), they are set forth in terms of the sophistic argumentation which phrased the new mechanism and rationalism of the day. One cannot overstress how powerful a scientific instrument Thucydides thought this argumentation to be. His speeches accordingly abound in general statements conveying the premises of the argumentation. Oratory necessarily relies on such premises, and even in Homer's speeches a prominent place is accorded the γνώμαι or proverbs expressing the accepted wisdom of his time. To return, then, to the present passage, it is clear that the general statements just quoted form not only the heart of the argument but the specific means whereby Thucydides expounded, from the speakers' point of

¹¹ This subject has been exhaustively treated by Jan Ros, S. J., *Die μεταβολή (Variatio) als Stilprinzip des Thukydides*, Paderborn, 1938.

view, the essential forces in the situation at hand. The abstract nouns, infinitives, and participles in these sentences denote, therefore, quite concretely the very elements in society and human nature that Thucydides thought permanent and was concerned to identify. In sum, the abstractions of his style exactly mirror the larger purpose of the *History*.

But one further point is worth observing. The infinitives, neuter adjectives and participles which he so favored were virtually forced on the Greek of the period, because as a language it had been poor in nouns. One can trace the growth of these forms in the playwrights and philosophers of the fifth century, and that growth is an index to the dawning conceptuality of the times. It might even be interesting to speculate how far Socrates' well-known difficulty in establishing definitions of general terms simply reflects the novelty of all such abstractions. But however that may be, these infinitives and participles which did service for nouns in Thucydides' style retained something of their early character as verbs, and in that fact is to be found perhaps the subtlest, most pervasive cause of his unique vividness. For when he makes the statement, "absence of injury to one's equals is a far firmer power," and expresses the first idea not by a noun but by the articular infinitive, τὸ μὴ ἀδικεῖν τοὺς ὁμοίους, literally "the not injuring one's equals," that verbal form alters the whole tone of the sentence, making it the statement not of a cold impersonal truth but of a truth conceived as action and fixed concretely in the human will. The same is true of the neuter participles. For instance, in the sentence, "ad-

vantage most accrues where least offense is given," the word "advantage," τὸ ξυμφέρων, means literally that in a situation which actually gives advantage. The term, once more, is not a mere abstraction but denotes something which has the concreteness of an object and the vitality of a force.

These distinctions are extremely hard to make in English, but from what has been said it is perhaps at least clear that Thucydides conceived of the social and psychological forces which he analyzed in his work as living, compulsive elements of the human mind, and that his style reflected his feeling. In reading the *History*, one has the impression of dealing not only with people and things but, even more, with the forces behind them which make them what they are. Nor can one tell sometimes whether these forces are to be conceived of as applying to an individual or to society. For instance, the previously quoted statement, "a final kindness done at an opportune time, though small, can cancel a great score," applies to either. But that very ambiguity is at the heart of Thucydides' power. The Greek city-state was small by modern standards, and he could not have conceived of it as an abstraction divorced from its separate members. Hence his observations on social man rest on a constant awareness of individual man, and his work as a whole, general in intent as it is, never rises to a plane of abstraction which falsifies immediate experience but, on the contrary, draws its unique power from its fidelity to experience. Thucydides was far closer to the active world of men's motives and interests than Plato or Aristotle in the next century, and, as a Greek

reared in the political atmosphere of the city-state at its height, he had a still greater advantage over most modern writers on history and politics. Moreover, as was said in the second chapter, the realm of human experience and social observation had always been the realm in which the Greek genius had won its greatest triumphs. All these considerations are to be felt in the forms which have just been discussed, forms at once abstract and concrete which, in their union of these qualities, vividly reflect the impersonal yet compelling forces in human affairs which it was Thucydides' chief purpose to describe.

Finally, Thucydides' diction was by later standards both archaic and poetic. He used what was called the *ἀρχαία* 'Ατθίς, the old Attic with -ξ- for -σ-, -ρσ- for -ρρ-, and -σσ- for -ττ-, which was abandoned as the official speech of Athens in 403. One must bear in mind, however, that he was himself writing at that time and even later. His adherence to the old diction is therefore only another mark of how intently his gaze was fixed on the earlier period. There can be no doubt that any reader at about the year 400 would have felt something old-fashioned in the work, as if it still breathed the austere and formal beauty of a past age. The nearest parallel both to Thucydides' diction and to his style is in fact to be found in the carefully wrought *Tetralogies* of Antiphon, who wrote at least as early as the 420's. But by 400 the smooth style of Lysias, a style which aimed at the ease and transparency of daily speech, had come into fashion, and the old formality was gone. One can watch a similar change slowly taking place even in the style of

tragedy. The fact is important for the question of the historicity of Thucydides' style, but may serve here simply to emphasize its old-fashionedness even at the time when he was writing. One must remember that throughout the fifth century, as during other such creative periods, styles both in prose and in verse changed very fast, and a man who, like Thucydides, had been absent from the center of culture for many years could easily find himself far outdistanced.

The poetic character of his diction appears in the number of words in the *History* which are otherwise found only in tragedy or in Ionic. No doubt this fact, which is also paralleled in Antiphon, simply shows once more that his taste was formed in an earlier period when usage was freer and when prose had not yet evolved for itself, as it was to do in the fourth century, a vocabulary quite distinct from that of verse. It is rather surprising, on the other hand, that Thucydides does not use many figures of speech. Pericles, for instance, was famous for his metaphors — that the dead in war were like the spring taken from the year, that the discordant Boeotians resembled old oaks battering their limbs against one another, that he could see war sweeping forward from the Peloponnesus.¹² Figures are easily remembered, and that may be the chief reason why these few sentences are virtually all that was preserved of Pericles' actual speeches. Nevertheless, early oratory, as it was poetic in other respects, may have been commonly somewhat figurative (certainly Antiphon is), and, if so,

¹² Aristotle, *Rhetoric* III 4. 3, 1407a and III 10. 7, 1411a. Plutarch, *Pericles* 8.

one must say that Thucydides' conceptual mind rarefied, and thus to some extent distorted, the practices which he had known as a youth. But, in itself, the abstraction of his style which was just discussed seems not to have been false to the older oratory. As we saw, nouns and all verbal substitutes for nouns were felt to have a poetic character, and, since it was characteristic of the older oratory to emulate verse, then these forms were natural to it. Plato, for instance, in the charming travesty which he makes in the *Symposium* of Gorgias' florid style,¹³ shows quite clearly that the thing which struck him most about it was not its careful balance (the trait usually associated with Gorgias) but the importance which the style gave to nouns. As we also saw, moreover, Thucydides' abstractions likewise reflect the increasing conceptuality of the later fifth century, and in this respect they find further parallels in the fragments of the philosophers of that time, for instance, Anaxagoras and Diogenes of Apollonia.¹⁴ In sum, his usage is extremely rich, and if the comparative lack of metaphor seems peculiar to Thucydides himself, still the usage as a whole suggests a period when prose, growing avidly like a young plant, strove to embellish itself from all possible sources, from verse primarily but also from the new domain of sophistry and philosophy.

We have thus, in effect, already broached the question how faithfully Thucydides' style reflects the earlier period of which he wrote, but, before turning entirely to

¹³ 194e-197e.

¹⁴ A more general affinity between Thucydides and Democritus extending beyond mere points of style calls for new interpretation.

that question, it will be useful to say a few final words of the later tradition of Greek prose, since it was by that tradition that Thucydides was judged. As has been suggested, the writers of the fourth century made two great innovations which were decisive for the whole future of prose in antiquity and even, to some extent, in modern times: they developed the periodic sentence, and they fell into a vocabulary for the most part quite distinct from that of verse.¹⁵ Both innovations represent the full triumph of an outlook at once conceptual and practical: the periodic sentence, because it reflects in its very structure the processes of logical thought; the more limited vocabulary, because it betrays a sharp awareness of the practical world on which thought exerts itself. A vehicle was thus evolved which was suited beyond all others to the needs of statesmen and advocates, historians and theorists concerned with active life. Taken over from the Greek of Isocrates and Demosthenes, this prose became enshrined in Roman practice by Cicero and in Roman rhetorical theory by Quintilian. Now for reasons which cannot be pursued here but which are in general connected with the progressive break-down of classical forms in the first century after Christ, Quintilian found himself in the position of having to defend this sovereign tradition of periodic prose against the so-

¹⁵ It is true that, even in the fourth century, an elaborate style such as that of Isocrates adhered less closely to ordinary idiom than did such simple styles as those of Lysias and Isaeus. Moreover, different types of oratory called for various degrees of elaboration, show-speeches being more ornate than parliamentary speeches, and the latter than courtroom speeches. Nevertheless, the two statements made above hold true in the main for all types of fourth-century oratory. Cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* III 1. 8-10, 1404a 24, on prose-diction.

called silver Latin of Seneca — the terse, sententious, poetic style which finds its greatest expression in Tacitus. But (and this is the point of interest here) Quintilian was not the sole champion of the periodic style. On the contrary, the bold and vivid prose of Thucydides had also been criticized, and from the same point of view, somewhat earlier by the rhetorician Dionysius of Halicarnassus.¹⁶ It is interesting that Thucydides seems to have enjoyed his greatest fame in antiquity at about this time (Caecilius of Cale Acte, to whom our tradition both about him and about Antiphon goes back, also lived then), and it might be profitable to speculate how far this enthusiasm for Thucydides which Dionysius attacked is to be connected with the contemporary trend to silver Latin which was opposed by Quintilian.

But it is more important to observe that Dionysius was simply judging Thucydides by the standards of the periodic style. He found the speeches extremely hard and said that few people at the time could read them without a commentary.¹⁷ Cicero had gone even further, calling them scarcely intelligible.¹⁸ Dionysius accordingly went on to signalize the many lapses in construction, the departures from normal order, the compressions and obscurities, which, as was suggested earlier, were virtually forced on Thucydides by the very nature of the antithetical style. For, being both an ambitious and an early style, it inevitably lacked the lucidity and the co-

¹⁶ The chief works are: *On Thucydides*, *To Ammaeus* II (a condensation and recapitulation of the former), and *To Pompeius* 3-5. Thucydides is further discussed in *On Literary Composition* 22, and *On Demosthenes* 1 and 9-10.

¹⁷ *On Thucydides* 51.

¹⁸ *Orator* 9, 30.

herence that were evolved later. As a result, Dionysius leaves the impression that, because Thucydides' style was unusual by later standards, it was also unusual by any standards, even those of his own age — an impression the more conceivable because few or no actual orations of the Periclean age survived. This impression gained strength from other rhetorical writers of antiquity such as pseudo-Longinus, pseudo-Demetrius, and Hermogenes, as well as from the authors of the *vitae* and scholia. To these men Thucydides appears in the main simply as the counterpart of Aeschylus, the representative in oratorical prose, as Aeschylus was in verse, of the grand style, the *χαρακτήρ ὑψηλός*,¹⁹ as opposed to the middle and plain styles. The language of the two was also compared, being felt to illustrate for their respective spheres the *αὐστηρὰ ἁρμονία*²⁰ or rough collocation of sounds, a further adjunct to the grand style. But although these judgments may be valuable and true, they serve merely to describe Thucydides' style, not to explain it, and the impression of its uniqueness still remains. Now Thucydides' style may in some respects be unique; to that we shall come presently. Nevertheless, there has always been a tendency to over-stress its uniqueness, precisely because the ancient critics looked at it, not historically in the context of its time, but rhetorically by the standards of their times. It was natural that they should have done so. One may doubt whether any age before our own has had to any great

¹⁹ Demetrius, *On Style* 40, 45, 65, 72. Longinus, *On the Sublime* 14. Marcellinus, 35-40, 50, 56.

²⁰ Dionysius, *On Literary Composition* 22.

extent that catholic appreciation of art which is based on the sense of history. Rather, the whole tradition of classicism stressed the continuing validity of great models, and this validity, as has been noted, Thucydides by the standards of fourth-century prose did not possess. There is no need here to discuss the relative merits of the classic and the historical points of view in criticism. They are not in any final sense mutually exclusive, but to ourselves, at least, the historical point of view must come into play first. To understand Thucydides' style, one must therefore abandon the attitude of Dionysius, think of the style in the setting of its period, and ask the question whether such an elaborate prose was not the inevitable concomitant of a great period of verse, even as the verse of the Elizabethan period found its echo in the involved prose of Browne, Milton, and Donne, rather than in the limpid and elegant manner of the eighteenth century.²¹

In answering this question, it will be well to restate a point which came up in the second chapter in connection with the content, as opposed to the style, of Thucydides' speeches: namely, that it is necessary to distinguish between his larger fidelity to the outlook and attitude of the period which he is describing and the specific fidelity of any given speech to the concrete situation in hand. The latter fidelity, as we saw, the speeches sometimes lack, because they look to one another as organic parts of the whole work, though even here one must remember that Thucydides expressly limited himself in any speech

²¹ For a comparison of Thucydides with writers of the seventeenth century, see W. R. M. Lamb, *Clio Enthroned*, Cambridge, 1914, pp. 808-814.

to "the general purport of what was actually said."²² The former and deeper fidelity, it was argued, Thucydides possesses for the simple reason that he was himself a product of the world of which he wrote. That is to say, his mind was formed on the characteristic problems of that world and his way of thought on its way of thought, as can still be seen from the parallels between his speeches and works composed at the time when they (or rather, their originals) were actually delivered. Just so with the style of his speeches. Since, as was said earlier, it is broadly speaking uniform throughout the work, one could not argue that any given speech, except possibly those of Pericles, was intended to catch the exact style of an individual speaker. Indeed such an argument would be quite profitless, since virtually nothing is known about these men's styles. All that can be argued, as in the case of Thucydides' thought, is simply that, although he wrote at the end of the war and although his long exile had no doubt left its stamp on every part of his being, still his sole experience of active life dated from the years before 424 and, when he came to conjure up the picture of active life in the *History*, he inevitably reverted to the impressions of those years. Accordingly his basic conception of the style of oratory, which he then applied to his own analyses and descriptions, was formed in that earlier period, and, though it may have been rarefied and individualized in the course of his exile, still on the whole and within certain broad limits it is faithful to that of the men, particularly the Athenians, whom he brings forward as speakers. One

²² I 22. 1.

could even say that it is more faithful for the period before 424, described in the first four books, than for that of the Sicilian expedition.

But to say even that little is to say much, chiefly for three reasons. In the first place, as was said earlier, in considering any period and, above all, those of a somewhat formal, stylized art, it is necessary to augment the well-known statement, "*Le style est l'homme*," by the statement, "*Le style est l'âge*." No author, particularly in periods of the sort just mentioned, is conceivable as a separate, unique phenomenon, but, if he has a greatness and individuality, they are a greatness and individuality founded upon a widespread taste. What the individual achievement of Sophocles or Shakespeare is, no one can say, but the fact that their works are unimaginable except as having been composed at the exact time that they were is an indication of how much these men owed to their times. Just so with Thucydides. Again, it is impossible to separate thought from style. Style is not simply the clothing of thought but its very veins and sinews, because the connection between word and idea is such that, if the word were changed, the whole connotation and quality of the idea would be changed also. Hence such a statement as that of Friedrich Blass mentioned at the outset — namely, that Thucydides gives a true picture of Pericles' mind but not of his oratory — is on the face of it incorrect. For if Pericles' mind possessed anything like the union of loftiness and realism, of absorption with theory and insight into practice, that Thucydides suggests (and Blass apparently agrees that it did), then it is impossible to imagine

that he did not express himself in language at once elevated and vigorous, conceptual and concrete, in much the way that Thucydides portrays him. And that is of course true of other men also, though, as we have seen, Thucydides attributes, presumably falsely to some extent, an Attic style and therefore an Attic intellectuality even to his non-Athenian speakers. But that is only to say that the conceptual, realistic thought formulated by the sophists in response to a widespread need inevitably found its echo in contemporary style, since style and thought are inseparable.

Finally, there is one very specific reason why Thucydides' bold and elevated style must be thought of as, in spite of its uniformity, on the whole faithful to the earlier period of which he writes: namely, that so far as we know, style was fairly uniform then. When Lysias, apparently following the sophist Thrasymachus, perfected the smooth style after the turn of the century, he did more than create a style nearer to ordinary idiom; he adapted style to individual character. But before then, speakers are hardly to be conceived as differing greatly from one another, precisely because this practice of adjusting speech to character had not as yet come in. As tragedy was uniformly couched in grand language differing from that of ordinary life, so, it must be imagined, was the oratory which was influenced by tragedy. One may recall here what was said earlier of seventeenth-century prose: namely, that in scope and in language it reflected the great period of verse out of which it issued. That is not to say that all the writers of that period are closely similar to one another — that

Milton's prose, for instance, exactly resembles Donne's — but merely that, as a class, seventeenth-century prose was in the grand manner and, as such, differed from that of the eighteenth. Just so, one must imagine, the oratorical prose of the late Periclean age was also and fairly uniformly in the grand manner, because it was nearer the verse which it emulated and because a style reflecting both ordinary speech and individual character had not as yet come into existence.

These, then, are the general grounds for believing that the late Periclean age saw the rise of a pretentious antithetical prose which borrowed many of its grander effects from verse but which was itself, narrowly speaking, the special vehicle of the new rationalism — a prose, in short, which is suggested, if not exemplified, by that of Thucydides. But one or two points which were touched on briefly at the start of the chapter may serve to make these general presumptions more specific. It was said there that, among the reasons why some modern scholars have refused to see any reflection of the style of Pericles, for instance, in the speeches of the *History*, are two reasons in particular: that the antithetical style owed much to the sophist Gorgias who came to Athens only in 427,²³ two years after Pericles' death, and that the style was in any case too difficult for the practical uses of politics.

As for the first point, Gorgias became unquestionably the supreme practitioner of an ornamental antithetical prose and was thought of as such by both Plato and Aristotle.²⁴ His rigid balancing of clauses, the further

²³ Diodorus, XII 53.

²⁴ *Symposium* 194e–197e. *Rhetoric* III 1. 9, 1404a 24.

emphasis which he placed on balance by means of rhyme and assonance, the great number of poetic words that he used, all created an impression of the utmost virtuosity, an impression which was the stronger because of the trifling subjects on which he lavished his mannered art. But Gorgias was not the inventor of the antithetical style. So widespread a phenomenon is in any case unthinkable as the creation of one man, but there are, in addition, numerous indications that the style was already well known in Athens before he came there. For instance, one of the most striking facts in the development of Greek tragedy is the way in which the grandiloquent, figurative diction of Aeschylus gave way, even in the earliest extant plays of Sophocles and Euripides, to a more measured style which was not only antithetical in itself but was used in balanced speeches. It was observed earlier that the attitude of mind which shows itself in the nice opposition of speeches in a debate is strictly the same attitude that seeks a similar balance within any given sentence. But, if so, then the whole development of debate in Sophocles and Euripides — something quite foreign to Aeschylus — is evidence for the growth of the antithetical style. For it must be realized that these debates of tragedy, as well as the logical style in which they were couched, cannot be explained as coming into Greek poetry from the tradition of poetry itself. That may at first sight seem confusing, since it was said earlier that antithetical prose in its turn drew heavily on the tradition of verse. But when one confronts these debates — for instance, those of the *Medea* produced in 431 on the eve of the war and only some months before Pericles delivered his Funeral Oration —

it is at once clear that their whole argumentation and train of thought, as well as their balanced structure and diction, give unmistakable traces of the effect of oratory. Protagoras, it will be recalled, had introduced the practice of arguing on both sides of a question as early as the forties, and the debates which appear in almost every tragedy from that time on unquestionably reflect the new interest in this art of conscious reasoning. Even Sophocles was affected by it, as one sees in the debates of the *Ajax* and *Antigone*, though far less profoundly so than the rationalist Euripides. Tragedy, in short, adapted itself to current interests and current attitudes of mind in a way that it could not have done had it kept to the forms and the diction of Aeschylus. For this reason it retained the position in the life of Athens that it did. It follows, therefore, that the antithetical style which later became associated with the name of Gorgias had been known and pursued in Athens for some twenty years before his famous visit in 427. Thus he presumably achieved his great renown, not as the innovator of something quite novel, but as one who carried something already admired and familiar to new lengths. And that assumption corresponds with what is known of Gorgias. By his artfully balanced clauses (*ισόκωλον*), by his initial or final rhymes (*παρομοίωσις*, *ὁμοιοτέλετον*), by his assonance, puns, and plays on words — in short, by his almost limitless affectation, he pressed the antithetical style, so to speak, to its illogical conclusion, sacrificing everything to an elegance which, if it had always inhered in the style, had nevertheless been limited by the demands of reason and clarity.

Now, as we have already seen, Thucydides' style is by no means Gorgianic in the sense that he too sacrificed everything to balance. On the contrary, he constantly and consciously tempered balance by variety. It is quite true that some Gorgianic sentences can be found in the *History* — for instance, the famous sentence of the Funeral Oration, "we love beauty with simplicity, we pursue wisdom without softness," φιλοκαλοῦμέν τε γὰρ μετ' εὐτελείας καὶ φιλοσοφοῦμεν ἄνευ μαλακίας.²⁵ The clauses begin and end with similar sounds and are roughly equal in length, though it is conspicuous that Thucydides could have made them more exactly so. But such effects were not unknown in Athens at the date when Pericles allegedly spoke, being paralleled in the *Medea* of that year and in Sophocles' *Ajax* of some years past.²⁶ It is conceivable that Thucydides was later influenced by Gorgias to attempt such occasional flights, but from all that has been said of the reciprocal ties between verse and prose in this period it seems far more likely that he heard such sentences from the lips of Pericles himself,²⁷ particularly because the actual sentence just quoted is one of those Olympian aphorisms which he quite evidently

²⁵ II 40. 1.

²⁶ *Medea* 408-409. *Ajax* 1085-1086.

²⁷ Plutarch (*Pericles* 8), on the authority of Stesimbrotus, quotes a sentence from Pericles' oration delivered about 440 on the dead in the Samian War which, if it is as exact as it appears to be, is absolute proof that Pericles spoke in the style that Thucydides attributes to him. Pericles compares the dead to the gods and goes on, οὐ γὰρ ἐκείνους αὐτοὺς ὁρῶμεν, ἀλλὰ ταῖς τιμαῖς ἃς ἔχουσι καὶ τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς ἃ παρέχουσιν, ἀθανάτους εἶναι τεκμαιρόμεθα, "for neither do we see them in their persons, but from the honors that they receive and the benefits that they give, infer their immortality." Cf. also Pericles' remark, just preceding, on Sophocles.

thought characteristic of the great man. One may therefore believe that Gorgias simply adopted as his settled manner the elegancies which others had attempted only rarely and that, like the Elizabethan Lyly, he got his fame for that extremism. If so, Thucydides' style is hardly Gorgianic in the least (on any view, it is only slightly so), since antithetical prose in itself antedates Gorgias' arrival in Athens and even the nicer effects of balance were not unknown then.

Numerous other facts could be adduced to the same end. For instance, the sophist Prodicus, who was famous for his careful distinctions between words and who influenced Thucydides in this respect,²⁸ was almost certainly in Athens before the war. But how inevitably his interest in nice distinctions found its outlet in an antithetical style appears from Plato's parody of his manner in the *Protagoras*.²⁹ He, then, is a specific figure in the development of the style during Thucydides' earlier years. Another is the sophist Antiphon, whose fragmentary work *On Concord*, *Περὶ Ὁμολοίας*, apparently dates from the early thirties.³⁰ Whether this man is the same as the orator Antiphon, we lack evidence to decide; he may very well have been. In any case, the *Περὶ Ὁμολοίας*, though more florid and ornate than the severely balanced *Tetralogies* (it was a showpiece, to which a certain floridity was natural), is only slightly less antithetical than they. It has been usual to date the *Tetralogies* after

²⁸ Cf. I 69. 6, II 62. 4, III 39. 2, 82. 4.

²⁹ 337a-c2. The dramatic date of the dialogue is before the war. Cf. *Laches* 197d.

³⁰ The subject is discussed at length in the article on Thucydides' style mentioned in the Foreword.

Gorgias' arrival on the sole and, as we have seen, inadequate ground that he was the originator of the style, but, even granting for the sake of argument that they were written in the late twenties and that no connection exists between Antiphon the sophist and Antiphon the rhetor, is it conceivable that the latter would have written speeches which were to be models of courtroom oratory in a style quite novel and thus, to ordinary men, quite repellent? The style must have been familiar earlier, even if Gorgias made some slight modifications and advances. Indeed, how familiar the work of the sophists — which cannot be dissociated from the new style of prose — had become by the year 427 appears from the fact that the young Aristophanes chose in that year to make his first comedy, the *Banqueters*, a satire on their influence. In the *Acharnians*,³¹ produced two years later, he expressly speaks of the elaborate oratory of the present generation, which he contrasts with that of the older men, the *Μαραθωνομάχαι*, as he calls them. Again, he cannot be thinking of the teachings of one man but of a phenomenon so widespread and familiar as to become the obvious subject of a joke. One can think of Thucydides himself, then a man probably in his early thirties who was to be elected one of the less important generals a year later, as of the group that Aristophanes was lampooning.

But it is perhaps less profitable to heap up historical proof of this sort than to consider how and why the antithetical style came into being in the Athens of Thucydides' youth. The confusing statement was made

³¹ Lines 685-686.

earlier that, although this prose itself owed much to verse, yet it in turn affected the verse of Sophocles and Euripides. What was meant was somewhat as follows. The Greek speech had always been a logical speech and, in particular, had always been capable of lucid balance, whether by means of the particles μέν and δέ or by the natural responsions of similar endings in verbs or nouns. Moreover, as was observed earlier, antithesis (especially in a spoken language) is by its very nature the readiest and most forceful way of securing clarity. It was natural then that, from earliest times, antithesis became associated with the γνώμαι or proverbs which were renewed from age to age as the main expression of wisdom among the Greek peoples. Homer abounds in such γνώμαι couched in antithesis: for instance, "A multitude of kings is bad; let there be one king," or "Who heeds the gods, him do they also hear."³² The elegiac line with its pause in the middle, which later became the special vehicle of sententious verse, was even better calculated to achieve this balanced clarity. The early elegists have many such couplets as this of Theognis, "Neither sowing the sea will you reap a deep harvest, nor doing good to the base get good in return."³³ The same kind of antithesis naturally appears in the prose maxims of the philosophers, especially Heraclitus. Now various modern scholars have attempted to derive antithetical prose from one or another earlier writer, for instance, Heraclitus, Empedocles, or Sophocles. But it seems far more natural to imagine that when the sophists attempted to phrase for their generation a new set of rules more con-

³² *Iliad* II 204; I 218.

³³ Lines 107-108.

sonant with the experience of the times and when, in addition, they sought for this new wisdom a dignity rivaling that of verse, they inevitably took over and extended the old tradition of gnomic antithesis. They extended it because the social and political generalizations which they were laying down were far more complicated, and hence far more in need of analysis, than those of the old proverbial wisdom. Hence there developed a prose both elevated and antithetical: elevated because it was falling heir to the mantle of verse; antithetical, because it represented the new clarity which logic was seeking to impose on many fresh realms of experience. It was this prose which in turn influenced both Sophocles and Euripides, causing them to abandon Aeschylus' imagistic manner in favor of balanced speeches and sentences more in keeping with the spirit of their age. Unless the reasoning of this chapter is quite mistaken, it was also this prose which Thucydides heard and learned in Athens before his exile and to which he inevitably reverted when, after years of isolation, he evoked in the *History* the image of the world that he had known.

We come then to one final point: namely, the previously mentioned objection that Thucydides' speeches, or any speeches remotely resembling them, would have been too difficult for ordinary people to understand. Now it has frequently been observed already that the speeches in the *History* are compressed and hence more abstract than actual speeches would have been. Thucydides' lack of imagery may also suggest that his brooding mind, seeking as it did a pattern beneath the

events of his time, read that theoretical pattern excessively into the speeches. Certainly the speeches look both forwards and backwards in the work as a whole, and, insofar as they do that, they are not copies but condensations, even interpretations, of actuality. The experience of exile, moreover, must have added a certain uniqueness and individuality to his style. Even as, by constant reflection, he would to some extent have ceased to think of earlier statesmen or earlier policies as they actually were but would unconsciously have simplified them until they came to typify certain deeper tendencies in a given state or in the war as a whole or even in human nature, so he must, again perhaps unconsciously, have altered his style to keep pace with his thought. How far he went in this direction is of course impossible to gauge with any accuracy. As was said earlier, it cannot be claimed that, in thought or in style, he gave a faithful copy of any individual speaker. Indeed, so far as a speaker's thought is concerned, he expressly claimed only a general faithfulness, and the same would apply to style. It seems almost too obvious to say that any great stylist, such as he was, inevitably makes of language a fresh, unique instrument. Nevertheless, the plain fact remains that, when he wrote at the end of the war, he wrote in a style which has its nearest counterpart in that of Antiphon's *Tetralogies* written a quarter of a century earlier. Accordingly it is clear that whatever individuality he achieved was simply a development of that earlier style — moreover, a development which was unaffected by all the stylistic fashions that had arisen in Athens in the meantime. We return, therefore, to the fundamental

contention that his style is, in essence and within uncertain limits, faithful to that of the period which he portrays, especially to the earlier part of that period treated in the first four books. Hence we return also to the crucial question whether that style was too hard for ordinary people to understand.

The question, it will be recalled, came up in the course of the second chapter in connection with the rhetoric of the later fifth century. It was observed there that that rhetoric, precisely because it was evolved to meet contemporary conditions, embraced many nascent studies, such as ethics and politics, which were later pursued independently. The new complexity and abstraction of all contemporary thought were also observed then, and it was said that such an abstraction, instead of being thought surprising, should seem exactly the thing to be expected in such a period. Indeed a comparatively widespread interest in the great questions of human life seems in itself the mark and prerequisite of a great period. Certainly the problem involved in the difficulty of Thucydides' style is no different from that presented by Aeschylus, Pindar, or Sophocles, even by parts of Euripides, or in another age, by Shakespeare's plays or Donne's sermons. The works of any of these men demanded on the part of their hearers a very high capacity not merely to follow difficult language but to understand general ideas. But we have already seen that Pericles in the Funeral Oration thought of democracy as a liberating force which gave men confidence in their individual intelligence. That judgment is fundamental not only for the fifth century but for the early age of democ-

rary in other periods. Allusion was made earlier to the length and difficulty of the sermons which were delivered to ordinary people, for the most part farmers reared on a few books, during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in this country. As was remarked, it seems an incontestable fact that periods of widening social horizons demand and receive from the ordinary man a new comprehension proportionate to his new self-respect. Such awakenings, to be sure, need not be connected, as in Athens, with the specific institutions of democracy. Moreover, it is no doubt always necessary in any great intellectual revival that leadership be exerted by the educated and, as such, the privileged classes. Such was particularly the case in the Elizabethan Renaissance. Nevertheless, any great awakening is inconceivable except as it is shared in by common men, even those whose immediate ancestors had been somewhat submerged socially. It is, therefore, on general principles incorrect to believe that such difficult speeches as those of Thucydides could never have had a wide appeal. The contrary, in certain eras of history, seems to have been the case.

To return more specifically to the Athens which Thucydides knew, the contemporary preference for general as opposed to specific ideas is most striking. For example, near the start of Euripides' *Medea* the heroine makes two appeals: first, to the women of the chorus to keep secret her plans of revenge and, then, to the king Creon to allow her to stay one more day in Corinth.³⁴ What is interesting are the reasons which she gives, which are in neither case specific. In speaking to the women,

³⁴ Lines 214-266, 292-315.

Medea talks at length of the unhappy position of women as a class and, in addressing Creon, dwells on the plight of all people who, like herself, are thought too intelligent. These speeches are not cited as being in any way remarkable, but simply to illustrate a prevailing preference for general ideas which could be illustrated equally well by many other passages. The fact is essentially to be explained by the interpretive function of the poet in the community, of which much was said earlier. The Greeks now, as in previous periods, expected from their poets not portrayals of individuals but general analyses of people and society, because they lacked any religious doctrine or science to give them such knowledge. When, then, after the middle of the fifth century, prose, especially oratorical prose, challenged the traditional superiority of verse, it also inherited the latter's attitudes and functions. Indeed one might imagine that this early prose was more involved and difficult than contemporary verse, both because it was young as an artistic medium and because it was more fully concerned with the complicated world of the present. Certainly, at least, one would hardly expect Pericles, as an Athenian and prose writer of this period, to have discussed democracy in any less profound and general way than Thucydides pictures. Nor is it strange (quite the contrary) that Diodotus should have raised the whole abstract question of responsibility for crime in the Mytilenean debate, or that the Athenian ambassadors at Sparta should have rehearsed the deep inner motives that prompt a state to empire. This type of broad argumentation is exactly like that previously cited from the

Medea. The difference is solely one of content, Thucydides' speakers being concerned with the general laws not of private but of political life. But we have already seen how this concern for the general expressed itself both in the balance of the antithetical style and more narrowly in the abstract nouns and their verbal substitutes which the style affected. We have also seen the directions in which Thucydides may be imagined to have intensified the style, adapting it to the deeper purposes of his *History*. But the antithetical style in itself is so necessary, so inevitable a vehicle for the type of thought which has just been discussed, that Thucydides must not be conceived as altering it radically. It is the difficult, ambitious style of an age before prose became associated for the most part with strictly practical purposes. It is, in short, the style of a great period when men expected to hear, whether in prose or in verse, searching questions discussed in noble language.



CHAPTER VIII

THE THOUGHT OF THUCYDIDES

WE TURN at last to a general appraisal of Thucydides' thought. The word "thought" is somewhat vague and might suggest any one of several ways of looking at the *History*. It suggests first and most obviously the scheme of the work, the precise pattern which Thucydides saw in the events of his time and which he felt would be repeated in a more or less similar form in similar eras of the future. Then the word suggests also the basic assumptions implicit in the *History* but only partly expressed. No author, however painstakingly he examine his mind, can explain fully to himself, much less to any reader, the frame of reference within which he makes all his conscious, immediate judgments. He may hold some of these assumptions in common with his time; others may be peculiar to himself; but all are vital to his work because they are the foundation beneath the actual structure of expressed ideas. Examples of 'what is meant are to be found in Thucydides' attitude towards the gods, towards chance, towards the element of compulsion in events, towards the ability of any individual to check or guide that element of compulsion, towards the relation of economic to political factors in history, towards the decisive elements in na-

tional or individual character. His views on some of these subjects are half-expressed in the *History*, or at least expressed by implication, and as such have come up earlier. But any formal discussion of his thought might be expected to treat them fully and together. Finally, there is a third implication which might not arise in the case of a contemporary or recent writer but which inevitably arises with some force in regard to one who wrote not only long ago and under extremely different conditions but with the express idea that what he wrote would be of permanent value. This point concerns the limitations which, from our point of view, were imposed on Thucydides by his relatively limited experience of history. The point, to be sure, is only an extension of that just mentioned, since it too involves the basic assumptions with which he approached his work. But it has a special pertinence for us, and certainly no treatment of his thought can escape considering in what ways it is either strengthened or weakened for modern readers by its narrow but proportionately vivid perspective. No doubt there are other ways in which it would be profitable to discuss the subject, but these are perhaps the main ways. The present chapter will therefore take up in order the intellectual scheme of the *History*, the basic assumptions with which Thucydides approached his work, and those aspects of it which, for better or worse, are fixed in the immediate experience of his time.

Since the scheme of the work was discussed at some length in earlier chapters, it need be taken up here only by way of summary. The fundamental fact of the *History* — that which dictates its plan and from which the

character both of the speeches and of the narrative follows directly — is the previously quoted statement of its prognostic purpose: “But if it [my work] be found useful by those who wish to know the exact nature of events that once took place and by reason of human nature will take place again in similar or analogous form, that is enough. My work has been composed, not for the applause of today’s hearing, but as a possession forever.”¹ Thucydides may well have written this whole section, in which he also discusses his speeches and narrative, after, rather than before, he composed the rest of the *History*, but the concept of historiography which is expressed here can only have been in his mind from the first. The reason for embarking on his work which he gave in his opening sentence and went on to validate in the *Archaeology* is that he grasped the significance of the economic advances of his time — advances which in turn reflected an era of competing imperialistic systems — and that he thus foresaw the magnitude of the struggle which would result when these two systems clashed. In other words, he realized that Greece in his time had passed from a condition of small independent nationalisms to one of larger, more inclusive units, the Peloponnesian League and the Delian Confederacy, and that what he was watching was the test whether one of these larger units would crush the other and go on to still greater power. It is in this context, then, that the statement regarding the prognostic purpose of his work is to be understood. It means that he looked forward to the repetition of such struggles in the future, the reason being that, as men

¹ I 22. 4.

strove towards higher material standards, they would find those standards impossible to attain except by means of a wider political unity and that the effort to achieve such a wider unity would provoke wars.

There has been some discussion recently as to exactly how Thucydides imagined his readers as standing towards future events.² Does he mean that these events are future to himself but will be present to his readers — in other words, that when events unroll, his readers will recognize them as similar to those which he had described? Or does he mean that, by reading his book, people will be able to predict what is to come? Perhaps he did not analyze his words so closely, but the former alternative seems essentially what he had in mind. He does not posit an exact duplication of the events of his time in the future but suggests that what is to come might be either similar or merely analogous.³ Thus he certainly did not mean that any reader of the *History* would be able to predict the future exactly, even though he may have felt that, since the forces which he was describing were permanent to human experience, one who was aware of these forces might have some advance inkling of the course of things. In sum, the statement means that he was consciously describing a stage of political evolution in which the subordination of small states to larger, more or less imperial, systems had brought great advances in material civilization and hence in military

² A. Grosskinsky, "Das Programm des Thukydides," and reviews by J. E. Powell, *Class. Rev.* 50 (1936), p. 174, and A. R. W. Harrison, *ibid.* 51 (1937), pp. 6-7.

³ I 22. 4.

power, that he felt that such stages would inevitably recur, that he himself was setting down the main forces at work in the period that he had watched, and that his readers at any like future period would consequently find his work useful as helping them to understand and even, in very general ways, to predict what was or would presently be happening then.

It was just said that this concept of historiography dictates both the character of the speeches and narrative and the plan of the work as a whole. As for the speeches and narrative, the former, as we saw, have as their main function to express the decisive elements in the situations successively at hand. They are thus Thucydides' chief means of setting forth those forces at work in his own time which he thought would be recurrent. Now it will be recalled that the reason why he believed in the recurrency of events was that he thought human nature uniform. So much appears from the words *κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον*, "by reason of human nature," which he includes in his statement about the future.⁴ It is this concept of fixed human nature which in turn forms the main link between the statement about the purpose of the *History* and that about the speeches. More specifically, it forms the link with the phrase *τὰ δέοντα*, "what was called for," which he said was what the speeches would primarily contain.⁵ For if the *History* is to enable the reader to understand the recurrent, because natural, issues of the war and if

⁴ This point is well argued by Grosskinsky in the monograph just cited, as well as by H. Patzer, "Das Problem der Geschichtsschreibung des Thukydides und die thukydeische Frage."

⁵ II 22. 1.

the speeches are to set forth the main lines of thought presenting themselves at each successive stage of events, then it follows that these lines of thought express the recurrent issues. But we also saw ⁶ that the words τὰ δέοντα probably had a rhetorical connotation for Thucydides: that is, that they refer to the argumentation evolved by the sophists during his youth as a means of analyzing the contemporary world. That argumentation was naturalistic and even to some extent mechanistic in character, in that it viewed human conduct as, so to speak, the quotient of the factors involved in men's nature and surroundings. Thus it rested on the assumption that a given class of men would respond uniformly to a given class of factors. There can be no doubt that Thucydides saw in this way of thought a searching, reliable, and even (to him) scientific means of laying bare the nerves of political events. Certainly he would not have hinged the whole purpose and future of his work on the idea of recurrency, had he not had in mind some very specific means both of appraising and of expounding what in those events he thought would be recurrent. In sum, it is clear that, through the idea of uniform responses to given conditions, which idea was concretely implemented in the arguments of the speeches, the latter became for him an ideal medium for conveying the prognostic teachings of history. He used the war, so to speak, as a field of experiment to which the general laws of human response could be applied and by which the presumption of their truth could be established.

⁶ Chapter III, above.

But when one has stated this theoretical function of the speeches in their relation to the purpose of the *History*, one must be quick to add, as he himself added, that the speeches are more than mere disquisitions on the factors underlying the main decisions of the war; they are limited to the actual points of view expressed by the various speakers.⁷ And this point brings us to the connection, not of the speeches, but of the action with the prognostic purpose of the *History*. For if Thucydides detected what he thought would be a recurrent pattern beneath the events of his time, it follows that, though the speeches might be one way of setting forth the elements in that pattern, the mere movement of events in themselves would also illustrate it. But one vital factor in events was of course the statesmen who were responsible for them. When, therefore, Thucydides limits the speeches to the points of view of these statesmen, he is not diminishing the speeches' representative or prognostic value. For inasmuch as Pericles and Cleon were Athenian leaders and the political evolution of Athens, so he thought, followed a pattern, then the actual policies of Pericles and Cleon as expressed in the speeches likewise revealed that pattern. And the same is true for the other speakers. In other words, by using the speeches to set forth not only the main lines of argument possible under various circumstances but also the actual positions of the main statesmen, he is doing in the speeches what he does throughout the whole narrative: namely, expounding a course of events which, in and for itself, was instructive.

⁷ II 22. 1.

In so doing, he felt that he must be strictly accurate, since the teachings which could be drawn from events would otherwise be vitiated. Hence he expressed the most stringent ideals of detailed truthfulness and, in practice, went to enormous pains both in gathering and in sifting all information relevant to the war. His habit of supporting specific statements by digressions of the sort which in modern times would more naturally form long footnotes or appendices is only another consequence of this same ideal of accuracy. One could say of him that he applied to historiography almost the identical methods of inductive reasoning that his older contemporary Socrates applied to philosophy. Both were seeking to erect new generalizations on the basis of a more careful study of detailed fact. As was noted earlier, the influence of medical theory (itself merely the most striking manifestation of the current feeling that progress in any specific field could be had only from more careful observation) tended to the same end. Thucydides' ideal of accuracy was, therefore, not an isolated phenomenon but one lodged in the whole character of his age. It is also clear that this ideal, as embodied both in the rigor of his narrative and in the fact that his speeches reflect actual policies of actual statesmen, subserved the prognostic purpose of his work.

Exactly how, then, do the speeches and narrative combine to effect this purpose? The answer is that together they cover the whole span between isolated fact and broad generalization. Though predominantly factual, the narrative itself often rises to the level of interpretation. The Archaeology, the Pentecontaëtia, and the sec-

tion on the causes of the war⁸ lay down at the outset the larger framework within which Thucydides sees the rise of democratic Athens and the position in which it placed her outmoded oligarchic rivals. Then, after the war had begun and the political weakness of Athens had revealed itself, such other interpretive passages as the description of the plague, the account of Pericles' successors and, above all, the analysis of revolution⁹ set forth in broadest terms the cause and nature of Athens' internal decay. Had Thucydides lived to treat the final stages of the war, he would no doubt have discussed still further the roots of this disunion. In addition, a large number of recurrent themes great and small illuminate and bind together the advancing narrative: for instance, the slowness of Sparta,¹⁰ the mistaken belief that she would win an early victory,¹¹ the surprising revelation (*παράλογος*) of Athens' power,¹² the desire of the Athenian masses for conquest,¹³ the magnitude of the whole struggle.¹⁴ All these passages perform an essentially different function from the ordinary factual narrative, a function, namely, of direction and interpretation.

They likewise give the key to the speeches. For when Thucydides expressly sketches what he thought the main lines of events, it is clear that he intended the speeches to

⁸ Respectively, I 1-19, 89-118, and 23.

⁹ Respectively, II 47-54, 65, and III 82-83.

¹⁰ I 70, 118. 2, 132. 5, IV 55. 2, V 63. 2, VI 88. 10, VIII 96. 5.

¹¹ I 121. 4, IV 85. 2, V 14. 3, VII 28. 3, VIII 24. 5.

¹² II 85. 2, III 16. 2, IV 12. 3, 40. 1, 55. 3, 108. 4, V 14. 3, VI 31. 1, VII 55. 1.

¹³ I 144. 1, II 65. 7, IV 17. 4, 21. 2, 41. 4, 92. 2, V 97, VI 18. 3, 24. 3-4, 31. 6, VII 75. 2 and 7.

¹⁴ A theme stated in the first sentence, confirmed in the *Archaeology*, and rising to a climax in the *Sicilian books*.

fill in the sketch and to emphasize its crucial points. Many examples of the relation between the speeches and the interpretive passages came up earlier. For instance, after the *Archaeology* and *Pentecontaëtia* have already set forth in general terms the significance of naval power and empire in Greek history, Pericles' speeches show the working of these same forces in greater detail and, in particular, make clear how they underlie Athens' actual position and strategy. Conversely, the harmful effect of this historical change on Sparta emerges in the speeches at Lacedaemon before the outbreak, where Thucydides also illustrates his previously expressed judgment that the Peloponnesians consciously willed the war in an effort to break Athens before it was too late.¹⁵ Again, the Mytilenean debate exemplifies what had been said in the passage on Pericles' successors about the degeneration of Athenian politics, and the chapter on revolutions finds its echo in the *Melian Dialogue* and Alcibiades' speech at Sparta.

Similar observations could be made of almost every speech, but it is more important to observe that Thucydides was not simply attributing his own ideas to his speakers. For insofar, as we just saw, as the events of the time followed a pattern and these same events were inseparable from the policies of statesmen, then the latter's policies were clearly part of the evidence by means of which Thucydides penetrated to the pattern. Thus it is more natural to believe that he knew the policies of the various states and leaders and thereby came to an understanding of what was taking place, than that he con-

¹⁵ I 23. 6, 88.

ceived an idea of what was taking place and then foisted it upon the states and leaders. No doubt, as has been repeatedly stated, he simplifies men's actual speeches and even adds clarifying arguments of a general character. But even modern historians who report a statesman's exact words do not report all his words, and, to the degree that they make a selection, they interpret. For selection is tantamount to saying that one aspect of a man's thought is more important than another. No historian can avoid selection, which is thus inseparable from interpretation and judgment. If Thucydides, then, discovered a guiding pattern beneath the war, emphasized in his speeches what bore out that pattern, and further fortified the speeches by arguments which he thought illustrative of man's basic promptings, he was only performing in a forthright way the obligations of judgment and interpretation which no historian can escape. In the last analysis, there can be no proof that any great interpretation of history is or is not correct. General presumptions of truth can be found in a man's respect for demonstrable fact, in the rigor of his methods, in his absence of bias, in the depth and range of historical factors that he invokes. In Thucydides' case these presumptions are favorable, though more will be said on the point presently. But what is to be emphasized now is that his method of expounding the course of history on various levels from detailed narrative, through more general speeches, to most general analyses, though different from modern practice, is in itself a coherent and logical form of historiography.

Finally, the prognostic purpose of the *History* dic-

tates not only the character of the speeches and narrative but the plan of the work as a whole. The context of competing, partly imperialistic systems within which Thucydides saw the struggle of his times was mentioned earlier. These two systems, the Spartan and the Athenian, to his mind differed fundamentally in origins, performance, and promise. The Spartans had long been the acknowledged leaders of Greece. They had made their conquests first, had organized themselves rigidly to hold down those conquests, were redoubtable and well-trained fighters, and had at their back a federation of oligarchic states which, if largely agricultural (with the exception of Corinth) and thus somewhat poor and backward, were nevertheless rich in man-power. Sparta was in many ways the relic of an earlier stage of the Greek city-state, when communities had been dependent on their local crops. Her magnificent infantry was designed to defeat any enemy in the field and hence to force his submission by dominating his land. Her oligarchic government, not less than her reliance on infantry, was the expression of an agricultural age, and if Sparta was more conservative and immobile than she need have been because of her extremely repressive policy towards her own subjects in Lacedaemon and Messenia, still a high degree of conservatism was implied in the very form of society which she represented. Again, though her creation of the Peloponnesian League to some extent reflects the progressive, centralizing tendencies of the fifth century, the loose character of the League also shows that Sparta was on the whole content with a state of localism hostile to economic and social progress

but advantageous to oligarchy. Over against Sparta and her allies stood democratic Athens at the head of a league which, unlike her rival, she had welded into a strong, centralized instrument subservient to herself. Athens' career as a first-class power dated only from the Persian wars, but in the less than five decades between then and the Peloponnesian war, she had already climbed to a position which menaced and overshadowed the rest of Greece. Indeed, the period of her widest territorial gains had followed within twenty-five years after Salamis. The force which had carried her to these heights was democracy, the effects of which had been seen, internally, in the liberated energy of her citizens and the material progress which was its fruit and, externally, in the loyalty of the lower classes of the empire and even in the friendliness of the same classes elsewhere. Thus the war, to Thucydides, was not the collision of two similar and merely competitive systems. It was, rather, the inevitable clash between a rising and a declining system, the former of which represented all the revolutionizing forces of the era, democracy, imperialism, material progress, a commercial economy, while the latter stood for the oligarchic, agricultural, cantonal Greece of the past.

This far-reaching contrast between the warring states was therefore a further and vital element in what Thucydides thought the repetitive pattern of the war. Accordingly, it is also fundamental to the plan of the *History*, being in fact its dominant theme from the opening through the speeches of Pericles, and a minor theme to the end. One must remember, to be sure, that Thucydi-

des' method of presenting the issues of the war vividly in the form of speeches precludes his expounding this contrast at length in his own words except in such digressions as the Archaeology and Pentecontaëtia. It appears, rather, simply as the major fact confronting the statesmen of the period, the fact which overshadows all their decisions and dictates their policies. Thus it is the opening speeches of the *History* that primarily set forth the nature and results — social, economic, psychological, military — of Athens' brilliant growth, as well as the position in which that growth left Sparta. These speeches likewise illustrate Thucydides' judgment that the Spartans for their own ends began the war — in other words, that the cause of the war was the upsetting of the old equilibrium in consequence of the progressive forces released by Athenian democracy. Here, then, is what can fairly be called the first of the two leading ideas of the *History*: the concept that the struggle towards higher standards evokes new governmental and social forms, the impact of which in turn upsets the existing balance of power and forces a conflict between the champions of the old and of the new society. This idea, fundamental to the prognostic teaching of the *History*, thus also prescribes its plan.

The second leading idea of the *History* is, as we have repeatedly seen, the progressive division of Athenian democracy under the strain of war, and with this idea we approach also what was called earlier the second main element in Thucydides' thought: namely, the framework of unexpressed or partly expressed assumptions with which he regarded the events of his time. The assump-

tion in this case has to do with the word democracy. As we saw,¹⁶ it covered even for Thucydides two essentially different concepts of the state: first, government by all the people rather than by an aristocratic few (the concept of the united state, *ξύμπασα πόλις*, set forth in the Funeral Oration) and, second, government in the exclusive interest of the lower classes, the *demos* in the narrower meaning of the term (the Old Oligarch's view of democracy, also that of Thucydides for the period following Pericles' death). We, however, are familiar with a whole other class of representative governments in which the lower house consists not of all the people but of elected members, and in which the executive branch, whether dependent on this house or likewise elected, is assured or virtually assured of several years of office. Now what is important to see is that, as compared with these modern forms of democracy, the form which Thucydides had in mind was, at best, infinitely more precarious, because infinitely more exposed to the winds of popular feeling. The reason was in part that, the city-state being small, the assembly could still be looked on as a meeting of all the people (though in fact it was not such, since the residents of the country districts certainly did not attend meetings regularly), and, in part, because the executive college of generals was annually elected. Moreover, at a stated monthly meeting of the assembly, these generals were subject to review and even to impeachment, a process apparently followed in the cases of both Pericles and Thucydides. This practice was the more dangerous because, as was just noted, the

¹⁶ On II 65, Chapter V, above.

assembly tended to be heavily dominated by the urban populace. The same element was not less important in determining policies, approving peace or war, and even in voting expeditions. It is clear, therefore, that Thucydides' views on democracy have reference to this exceptionally variable and sensitive form of popular government, which was the only form that he knew. Accordingly, when he bases the whole latter part of his *History* on the idea that, fundamental as democracy was to the growth and power of Athens, it proved incapable after Pericles' death of a temperate policy or consistent leadership, one must recognize that he was demanding this temperance and consistency of a form of democratic government which was perhaps least capable of providing them, especially under the conditions of siege and plague which obtained at Athens at various times throughout the war.

To conclude then with the plan of the *History*, after the great opening on the strength of Athens, Thucydides introduces with the account of the plague and, even more clearly, with that of Pericles' successors his second great theme of Athens' political weakness. This theme rises in turn to two distinct climaxes, first, in the rejection of peace at the time of Pylos, together with its results at Delium and Amphipolis, and, second, in the Sicilian expedition. As was noted earlier, had he lived to finish the *History*, he would presumably have risen to a third such climax in the final events of the war. The emphasis, however, of these two great sections of the *History* is somewhat different. In the former, he sketches only gradually the growing demoralization of

Greece and, particularly, of Athens. The sections on the plague and on Pericles' successors lead to the disturbing Mytilenean debate, and the latter to the terrible analysis of revolution, but all these sections precede the victory of Pylos, which was the proof of Pericles' foresight and of Athens' strength. Then, with Cleon's rejection of Sparta's offer, which on any Periclean view of the war should have meant the end of hostilities and the beginning of a new period of healing and consolidation, the intent of these earlier sections becomes clear. They had set forth the vicious cycle whereby war produced suffering, suffering unrest, unrest political violence, and this violence a type of leadership which sacrificed the state to its own partisan ends. Cleon's destructive policy of expansion was therefore a result of the previously traced social disturbance.

But with the second great climax of the *History*, the Sicilian expedition, this new violence of mood, as the Melian Dialogue shows, is an established fact. The question now is not whether Athens will press ruthlessly towards greater power but whether that attempt will be successful. The scale of the expedition testifies as nothing else does to Athens' great potentialities which had been set forth at the beginning. But now again the instability which had previously revealed itself in Cleon's leadership reappears in the division among the generals regarding Sicily, in the political partisanship at home which underlay that division, in Alcibiades' very character, and, most important of all, in the fatal decision whereby, granted the expedition was to be carried out at all, he should have been dismissed from office. The

disastrous cycle which had set in at the outset had thus reached its height, and, though the original disparity in strength between Athens and her opponents permitted her to fight on for some years more and even to win further victories, the same forces which had brought her to this state pursued her to the end.

It was said above that Thucydides demanded union and temperance of a form of democracy in which these qualities were particularly difficult to achieve. But though it is customary nowadays to stress other aspects of democracy than its need of cohesion and leadership, this need is as great in a democracy as in any other form of state, probably greater, since democracy depends directly on public opinion. When, therefore, Thucydides lays the defeat of Athens to her own disunity, he touches a problem which affects any and every form of democratic government, even though he could not have known that the particular form that obtained at Athens seems, in the light of history, particularly prone to this very fault. For the fault can emerge, whatever the form, and his work is as great as it is because its two great themes, the creative, revolutionizing force of democracy and its potential decay through the clash of embittered interests, have a validity transcending the particular events and precise political forms which he had in mind.

So much for the scheme of the *History*. We turn, then, to the question of Thucydides' basic assumptions, and perhaps the most important of these for purposes of understanding his work is the degree of inevitability which he assumed in the whole previously described process. Now the idea of historical compulsion is re-

peatedly expressed throughout the work. The Spartans, he says in the section on the causes of the war, were "compelled" to fight through fear of Athens' growing power;¹⁷ the Athenians, say the envoys at Sparta, were "compelled" to carry on their empire once they had started;¹⁸ "it is no longer possible," says Pericles in his last speech, to turn back without losing everything;¹⁹ in peace, Thucydides writes in the crucial chapter on revolutions, men are not subject to compulsions, "but war, by removing the ease of daily life, is a teacher of violence and lowers the mood of the masses to the level of contemporary events."²⁰ But it will be recalled that the whole description of social change from which this last sentence is taken was also previously used to illustrate the concept of uniform responses to given conditions. That concept, therefore, is likewise involved in the idea that there were forces working themselves out in the period which were beyond the control of any human agent. The same idea is no less apparent in Thucydides' belief that the war followed a pattern which, being fixed in human nature, would be repetitive and which posterity should therefore know. Accordingly, when one describes the *History* as tracing a recurrent process, one tacitly says that that process inheres in the nature of society and, so far as the individual is concerned, is thus to some extent inescapable.

Nevertheless, it would be misleading to overstress this

¹⁷ I 23. 6. The idea of compulsion is interestingly discussed by W. W. Jaeger, *Paideia* (Eng. transl. by G. Highet, New York, 1939), pp. 389-395.

¹⁸ I 75. 3.

¹⁹ II 63. 2.

²⁰ III 82. 2.

sense of historical compulsion or at least to think of it out of its context, since it is only, so to speak, the obverse of another leading idea of the *History*, the idea of correct foreknowledge, *πρόγνωσις*. If you say in one breath that events follow a pattern but, in the next, that the pattern can and should be understood, you imply that such understanding will be the basis of action, which in turn will affect events. In other words, the didactic purpose of the *History* rests on the assumption that, by knowing the natural tendencies of society, you can, if not change, at least guide them. Certainly nothing is more characteristic of Thucydides than his faith in the human mind or his admiration for able leaders. It will be recalled in what high terms he praises Themistocles' untutored ability to foresee the course of things²¹ and how he describes his own speeches as expounding "what was called for," *τὰ δέοντα* — that is, the essential elements in a situation — in the same way that he expressly says Pericles and Antiphon could do.²² Indeed, the previously quoted sentence from the estimate of Pericles' successors, "such abundant justification did he have when he prophesied an easy victory over the Peloponnesians alone,"²³ shows that the *History* is in part simply a vindication of Pericles' foresight.

That being the case, it is clear that the element of compulsion in events was not, to his mind, such that it could not have been controlled or directed. His idea of it in some ways resembles Plato's and Aristotle's idea of the freedom of the will: namely, the one is originally free

²¹ I 138. 3.

²² II 60. 5, 65. 5, VIII 68. 1.

²³ II 65. 13.

to make a choice but, having made it, is thereafter committed.²⁴ But with Thucydides, Athens was of course never wholly free. As is clear from the speech of the envoys at Sparta, she could not have turned back from democracy or empire once she had embarked on them. She was free only to the extent that an able leader could guide these already existent forces along proper channels. Here is the significance of Cleon's refusal of peace at the time of Pylos. Had he been Pericles, he could have checked at that time the rise of forces hostile to sane democracy. As it was, he did not, and Athens remained in the grip of those forces to the extent that, at the time of Syracuse, she no longer had even the freedom to decide on a return to peace but only to take the proper measures for continued expansion. But here again she failed, and her range of choice was still further narrowed. A determinist could, to be sure, say that she in fact had no such freedom of choice at any of these stages but that Cleon's refusal of peace and the people's recall of Alcibiades were simply inevitable symptoms of the times. Such a judgment may be correct, but it is not Thucydides' judgment. As we saw, he pictures Hermocrates as one who could and did stem at Syracuse the same forces, personified in the populist Athenagoras, which were operating at Athens.²⁵ He clearly feels that, had Athens produced another Pericles, the bitter process which he describes would not have taken place. Nor will he say that Athens could not have produced such a man. On the contrary, the didactic function of the *History* is

²⁴ *Republic* X, 617c. *Nic. Ethics* III 1-5.

²⁵ Cf. esp. VI 33-41.

precisely to produce such men in the future. In this disparity, then, between the range of possible good choices and the actual bad choices that were made, the sense of tragedy enters in. The *History* is a guide to future readers to instruct them in the operation of forces which, if wrong choices are made, will go as he describes but which could go otherwise as a result of right choices and might have gone so in Athens' case, had she possessed the leaders that she might have had. If, then, Thucydides strongly felt the compulsive forces of history, his very concentration on them, as well as his characteristic (and characteristically Greek) reliance on the intellect, led him to define them so exactly as to bring them within the realm of comprehension and thus of direction, which direction in turn became to him the special task of the statesman endowed with foresight. His view of history is of an interlocking process in which individuals and social forces exert an almost equal power.

This brings us to certain minor assumptions which are in a sense corollaries of the foregoing, notably those about the gods and about chance. It need hardly be said that in the *History* the gods are chiefly remarkable by their absence. In the pathetic, unanswered appeals to them which he puts in the mouths of people in distress, first the Plataeans, then the Melians, then Nicias on the retreat from Syracuse,²⁶ he seems to go out of his way to deny their intervention in human affairs. Certainly nothing could better emphasize the ineluctability that he posited in the purely human forces of history than these vain cries. In the same spirit he disparages all marks of

²⁶ Respectively, III 58, V 104-105, VII 77. 3-4.

superstition: for instance, oracles that allegedly foretold the length of the war,²⁷ signs that were said to attend or predict its course,²⁸ belief in portents such as Nicias showed at the time of the eclipse,²⁹ or the common soldiers' fears of strange phenomena.³⁰ Conversely, he gives naturalistic explanations for such things as storms and diseases and suggests a similar explanation for the eclipse.³¹ The catalogue of disasters which he includes in the section on the causes of the war³² is very strongly reminiscent of the Hippocratic writings mentioned earlier, notably the *Epidemics*, in which the author carefully lists the conditions of weather, season, and the like, which attended the course of given diseases. Though Thucydides obviously imagined no similar causal relation between the war and the earthquakes and droughts which he mentions, he at least regards these in a similar spirit, that is, from a strictly naturalistic point of view.

Then again, his sense that the gods may simply be omitted from history shows itself in his distinct coolness towards the traditional religiosity of the Spartans, which he evidently thought quite specious. Thus he emphasizes how Delphi's support in the war was financially useful to them,³³ how they revived the old charge of hereditary taint for the simple purpose of injuring Pericles,³⁴ how

²⁷ V 26.

²⁹ VII 50. 4.

²⁸ II 8. 2, 17. 2, 54.

³⁰ VI 70. 1, VII 79. 3.

³¹ In addition to the description of the plague, cf. VII 47. 2, 79. 3, 87. 2, and, for the eclipse, interpret VII 50. 4 by II 28.

³² I 23.

³³ I 118. 3, 121. 3, 143. 1.

³⁴ I 127. 1.

their pious abrogation of the sacred ties binding them to Plataea hardly masked the true character of their attack,³⁵ how they themselves recognized in their hearts the injustice of their breaking the Thirty Years' Peace.³⁶ The statement in the Melian Dialogue³⁷ that the Spartans, however high their reputation, never acted except out of self-interest undoubtedly expressed his own belief, and, as we saw, the Athenians' contrasting frankness regarding their motives was probably true to the Athens of the time and, as such, was certainly far more congenial to him. All this is not to say that he may not have believed in the gods. He mentions disbelief as a symptom of social disintegration and goes out of his way to praise the high character of the pious Nicias.³⁸ He simply did not believe that the gods intervened in the working out of the political forces which he thought operative in history. One could even say that his work was a kind of Greek tragedy in which the operation of these human forces is substituted for that of divine forces; but to this subject we shall return at the end.

But though the gods thus played no part in history, an element of the incalculable nevertheless remained, and this element he called chance, *τύχη*. The word is not to be thought of in the sense that it came to have in Hellenistic and even, in its translation *fortuna*, in Roman times. In these periods, in which sudden and vast change produced equally sudden and vast prosperity,

³⁵ Compare II 74. 2 and III 68. 4. Note also III 52. 2.

³⁶ VII 18. 2.

³⁷ V 105. 4.

³⁸ II 53. 4, III 82. 6, VII 86. 5.

chance could be thought of as a principle inherent in the universe which somehow caused, and therefore explained, such brilliant success. Nor is the word what it is in Euripides, where it essentially reflects the author's deep sense of the irrationality of life. Thucydides, as has been seen, did not think life illogical but, on the contrary, rested his whole work on the assumption that it follows and will follow orderly courses. Chance to him therefore denoted simply the minor, if occasionally critical, happenings which could not be calculated on, though it might also cover unforeseen events, such as the plague, of which the cause was obscure. Thus the speeches abound in references to the uncertain course of war once it gets under way, and the two main events of the war, Pylos and Syracuse, are both described as involving accident: the former in the storm that held the ships at Pylos, thus enabling Demosthenes to fortify himself there; the latter in the untimely desecration of the Hermae and the still more untimely eclipse. But it would be quite mistaken to overstress or to believe that Thucydides overstressed these strokes of fortune, particularly in Demosthenes' case,³⁹ whose plan was wholly Periclean and who was dependent on luck only because he was not yet in office and therefore not his own master.

Nevertheless, on a more philosophic plane, it is no doubt true that Thucydides recognized an area of life which could never be subject to exact prediction and

³⁹ As was done in F. M. Cornford's *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, pp. 82-109. The remark about the arrival of the Messenians at Pylos, οἱ ἔτυχον παραγενόμενοι (IV 9. 1), should not, moreover, be taken to mean that they arrived by chance, but that they had just arrived. Cf. Classen-Steup, *ad loc.*, and such parallels as II 95. 3, III 105. 3, VIII 17. 3.

that his attitude in this respect is entirely Greek. Solon, for instance, in his great poem on human sufferings,⁴⁰ divides them into those which are explicable as the consequence of sin, even sins committed in previous generations, and those which result simply from man's inevitable and natural inability to foresee the outcome even of innocent acts. In the same spirit, Plato constates in the *Timaeus*⁴¹ a certain brutish material element in the universe which makes it incapable of ever reflecting fully the imprint of the creator's mind. Both these ideas, different as they are from each other and from Thucydides' idea of chance, have this in common with his idea, that they recognize the incapacity of thought to bring life wholly within its power. They also reveal a similar sense that the mind, though it must stop short of this final sway, can nevertheless see design in life — in other words, that life is to that extent logical and orderly. No one perhaps more fully expressed this characteristically Greek confidence in the mind than Thucydides, and his idea of chance, therefore, while denoting a realm in which thought, or at least prognostic thought, cannot operate, only emphasizes the more clearly the greater and more important realms in which it is successful. One should perhaps add that the able general and even the able individual was, to his mind, the man who could adjust himself most quickly to accident.⁴² He

⁴⁰ Fg. 1 (Diehl).

⁴¹ 48a.

⁴² All his main figures have this insight into the need of meeting new circumstances with swift and bold action: Pericles (I 143. 5), Hermocrates (VI 34), Demosthenes both at Pylos and at Syracuse (VII 42. 3-5), and Brasidas (esp. IV 81. 1). Cf. also the unique little speech of Teutiaplus the Elean (III 30).

thought such suppleness far more characteristic of the Athenians than of the Spartans.⁴³

It is difficult, finally, to leave this question of Thucydides' basic assumptions without a word on the somewhat vague subject of the kinds of matters which he thought relevant to history. Surprise has often been expressed that, except for a general phrase or two in the Funeral Oration, he says nothing of the artistic and literary accomplishments of Athens in this her greatest period, or, what amounts to the same thing, that he was so absorbed with her material and political achievements, which the war in some sense terminated, as to overlook her cultural achievements, which the war did not affect.⁴⁴ These criticisms present Thucydides as a materialist who crassly misjudged in what sphere Athens' greatest triumphs lay. Again, a quite opposite type of criticism has been made of him: namely, that, assuming he was a materialist, he was a bad one, since he had no grasp of economic forces.⁴⁵

Of these two extremes of criticism, the former is undoubtedly better founded than the latter, which is in fact quite unfounded. Some decades ago the novel thesis was expounded⁴⁶ that there must have been a strong clique of merchants in the Piraeus interested in expansion, that these men influenced all the statesmen of the period, and that the Sicilian expedition, in particular, was their work — in short, that the war followed familiar lines of

⁴³ I 70, II 41. 4.

⁴⁴ So A. E. Zimmern, *Solon and Croesus*, Oxford, 1928, pp. 81-104.

⁴⁵ So F. M. Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, pp. 1-76, and G. B. Grundy, *Thucydides and the History of His Age*, pp. 315-332.

⁴⁶ By Cornford, *loc. cit.*

capitalistic imperialism, which Thucydides did not understand. Now it may be that a powerful trading class of this sort existed in some ancient states, for instance, Carthage, and that its hand is to be seen in the military acts of these states. But such was certainly not the case in Athens. For, even leaving aside the extremely doubtful question whether great merchant families of the type that flourished at Carthage, during the Italian Renaissance, or in modern times, ever existed in the Greek city-state, they were clearly not dominant in the Athens that Thucydides knew. Indeed, as the events of our time make clear, to think of economic forces as showing themselves normally through the acts of individual capitalists is mistaken, and to apply such an idea to Thucydides is simply to judge him and his world by the peculiar conditions of the nineteenth century. As was said, there presumably are periods in which capitalistic imperialism is the main cause of wars, but there are other periods, as we know, in which economic forces show themselves socially and politically in the desire of the masses for better conditions. To the degree, then, that the masses become powerful politically and, above all, create leaders who are committed to raising standards by military expansion (the means, in turn, by which these leaders continue to stay in power), then a war follows which, to be sure, has economic causes but in which those causes operate primarily through the leaders and their following, not through individual capitalists. Such was the war which Thucydides was describing, at least in its later phases; in its initial phase it was, as we have seen, the repressive effort of an oligarchic, agricultural

society to escape the menace of a democratic, mercantile society. To say, then, that Thucydides did not understand economic causes is absurd, when one of his greatest triumphs is to have depicted with the utmost clarity the connection between social distress, political violence, and military adventure, all of which alike went back to economic causes.

That being the case, one returns to the other and better-founded criticism that Thucydides was blind to Athens' true achievements, which were cultural. But even this criticism is largely mistaken, for two reasons. The first is our own false perspective. We are aware of many later peoples who were better fitted than the Athenians in respect of geography and population to achieve the kind of hegemony that Thucydides thought Athens should have achieved. Judging Athens therefore by the standards of Macedon and Rome, we say that the task of unifying Greece, much less wider areas, was beyond her, and that her importance consequently lay in other realms than politics. But Thucydides, it need hardly be said, did not have this perspective. The second reason is subtler: namely, that in what he says of the liberating force of democracy he does to a large extent explain Athens' cultural achievements, though in a way in which we are not prone to do. In our admiration for Greek art and thought, we often tend to think of Ictinus and Phidias, Sophocles and Socrates, as living in a kind of ideal world devoted to higher things. But Thucydides, beyond any ancient author, recalls us to the truth that the achievements of the great age are conceivable only as part of the total upsurge of the Athe-

nian state and people, the more so because, as was said earlier, art and literature were to an exceptional degree rooted in the communal life of the Greek state. His picture, therefore, of Periclean Athens as, on the one hand, lit by corporate feeling and given to corporate enterprise but, on the other, stimulating the individual to comprehend and use his powers to the full is absolutely fundamental to an understanding even of the higher creations of the time. If then Thucydides, though he explained, did not dwell on these creations, the reason lay partly in his previously mentioned perspective and, even more, in his time. It was only when Athens had failed in her attempt at political leadership that men like Isocrates slowly came to understand the more imponderable realms in which she had not failed. But Thucydides, living at the time of her failure, was naturally absorbed above all else with the question why it came about. That he was not insensitive to artistic and intellectual things, his own style shows, but these were not to him the important things.

To return, then, to the question of what kind of subjects he thought relevant to history, it is clear that these were subjects directly connected with war and politics. As was observed earlier, he tells, even in the case of outstanding men, nothing which did not have this immediate bearing on events. The result was that he made a kind of double selection, choosing first the matters which were relevant to the war in the sense just described and then, for purposes of emphasis, making clear through his speeches and analyses which of these matters were most important. The *History* accordingly lacks that

variety and abundance of detail which make Herodotus' work so attractive and in this respect is perhaps more alien than the latter both to modern tastes and to modern methods. For Herodotus' inclusion of detail serves to acquaint the reader directly with the life of the times and thus to permit him to some degree to draw his own conclusions about what in that life was important. Thucydides, by contrast, through his process of selection, points the conclusions which a reader should draw, which conclusions in turn illustrate the pattern of events which he himself saw. It can therefore be said that, to the degree that he was absorbed with this pattern, to that degree was the scope of his work narrowed and intensified, or, in other words, that his avoidance of detail follows from his didactic purpose.

We turn at last, therefore, to the final topic mentioned at the start, namely, the limitations imposed on Thucydides by his comparatively narrow experience of history. Some of these limitations have come up already — for instance, his assumption that the singularly unstable form of democracy that he knew was the final and necessary form of democracy. A like error is to be seen in his view that repression and discipline are primarily the marks of an aristocratic oligarchy. They can obviously appear under other types of oligarchy. Again, as we saw, there is a certain misproportion in his belief that even the strongest Greek state, restricted as all were in population and area, was fitted for a great political role in history. It could even be argued that the smallness of the Greek city restricted his outlook still more fundamentally in that, because it made the city a more com-

prehensible unit than the vast nations of modern times, it made the whole process of history proportionately too comprehensible.

One could go on to enumerate many other ways in which his judgment bore the peculiar marks of his time and place. Nevertheless, these limitations, however great, are rather of degree than of kind. Though the government of Athens was especially sensitive to public opinion, all democratic governments, however constitutionally protected, depend on public opinion and can be lamed when it is divided; and as for the weakness of Athens, she was strong by contemporary standards and, from the point of view of days' travel, was at least as distant from Sicily as Europe from America. Again, the comparative intelligibility of the small Greek city-state, while conducing perhaps to an excessively simple view of history, had other and compensating advantages for an historian. Indeed, this very factor of the size of what he had to understand perhaps more than anything else explains Thucydides' greatness. For it permitted him to do two vitally important things: first, to connect all political and social abstractions directly with men's actual conduct, and, second, to see so clearly the nature of the forces at work in any one state or between several states that these could acquire a representative value for him as the forces underlying history. For the former reason, his work, abstract as it is, especially in the speeches and analyses, reveals a fidelity to experience, an intimacy with human nature, a grasp of the motives that control man's social, because they control his individual, conduct, which it could not have had if he had

been writing of larger-scale events, and, as we saw in the last chapter, his style vividly mirrors his thought in this respect. For the latter reason, his work, like other great Greek writings, rises at times to a plane of simplification on which it seems to deal directly with certain of the basic forces that make life what it is. In his case, these forces show themselves in history; in that of Aeschylus and Sophocles, they are the forces inherent in man's natural condition. In both cases, such heights of simplification were possible only because these authors, surveying a bounded but proportionately intense field of experience, were able to isolate from it its most enduring traits. The very limitation, therefore, of Thucydides' perspective, while in one sense it led him to generalize on insufficient data, in another sense enabled him to transcend those data because it prompted him to discover their most inward, most essential causes.

The previous mention of Greek drama brings us to a last aspect of Thucydides' inheritance which, whether as a limitation or an advantage, was of crucial importance for his work. If one read in succession, first, Herodotus' account of Salamis and, then, the messenger-speeches of any one of several tragedies — for instance, the description of Salamis in Aeschylus' *Persae* or the battle-pieces in Euripides' *Heraclidae*, *Suppliants* or *Phoenissae* — it is at once clear which of the two Thucydides' descriptions more resemble. Herodotus loses himself in detail, fails to balance the parts of his narrative against each other, and achieves little suspense or climax. The opposite is true of Aeschylus, whose account of Salamis has in fact many striking similarities to Thucydides' descrip-

tion of the great final struggle in the harbor of Syracuse.⁴⁷ Both trace the course of battle from the exhortations at the start, through the first successes of the ultimately beaten, to the supreme agony of conflict, and finally to the turning and rout. The form and movement of the two descriptions are similar, so also their general tone and at times even their language. Thucydides differs from Aeschylus largely in his more exact detail and greater psychological acuteness, and it is significant that Euripides too departs from his predecessor in much these same ways. Thus he, like Thucydides, notes the cries, the noise, and the shifting fortunes of battle;⁴⁸ creates the impression of many simultaneous events;⁴⁹ and even observes, as Thucydides does at the height of the struggle at Syracuse, the varied emotions of the on-lookers.⁵⁰

There seems no doubt therefore that, when Thucydides set himself to describe the great actions of the war, he unconsciously or, more probably, consciously fell into the manner of the tragedians rather than of Herodotus or indeed of any prose writer. Nor is it surprising that he should have done so. As we saw, antithetical prose, as the first consciously artistic prose, for want of any other model inevitably took most of its higher effects from verse. Moreover, this stylistic kinship between Thucydides and the tragedians is only part, as we also saw, of a still wider kinship. Thus Thucydides' paired speeches and many of his arguments find striking paral-

⁴⁷ VII 71. *Persians* 361-432. Compare also VII 69. 2 and *Persians* 403-405.

⁴⁸ *Heraclidae* 839-840, *Suppliants* 702, 711-712, *Phoenissae* 1145.

⁴⁹ *Suppliants* 683-693. ⁵⁰ *Suppliants* 719-720, *Phoenissae* 1388-1389.

lels in Euripides, and his quality of confined intensity as compared with Herodotus is almost exactly the quality of Sophocles as compared with Aeschylus. Again, there is something unmistakably dramatic in his way of brusquely juxtaposing scenes of quite opposite import, for instance, the Funeral Oration and the plague, the insolent Melian Dialogue and the crushing defeat at Syracuse. Just so, Sophocles commonly sets a scene of joy or relief just before the final disaster. More subtly still, Thucydides' method of emphasizing in any one man — for instance, Pericles — only a few dominant traits which in turn exemplify the leading ideas of the work is almost identical with Sophocles' method. As we learn little of Pericles except his integrity, his patriotism, his ability to dominate the people, and, above all, his correct estimate of Athens' strength — qualities immediately bound up with the major teachings of the *History* — so we know almost nothing of Antigone beyond what bears on the conflict between religion and the state or of Oedipus beyond what illustrates his mortal self-confidence. As a result, these characters merge, so to speak, with the higher issues of the works in such a way as to become almost symbols of those issues. Nor is this less true of Pericles and Cleon, Nicias and Alcibiades, than it is of Antigone and Oedipus. This, to be sure, is only a further illustration of the fact just mentioned, namely, the ability of the greatest Greek authors to isolate the enduring traits of experience. But that Thucydides and the tragedians should have possessed this ability in common is a crowning mark of their kinship.

The almost universal feeling that there is a strong element of tragedy in the *History* is therefore correct. After all, no Athenian writing in Thucydides' time and on such a theme as his could fail to be influenced by the great literary form which had been both his city's unique discovery and her most characteristic medium. On the other hand, it would be incorrect, as some have done,⁵¹ to press this element of tragedy in the *History* too far and, above all, to imagine it as the key not merely to the method and spirit of the *History* but even to its meaning. In particular, it would be incorrect to believe that when Thucydides describes the Athenians as led by error to overconfidence and final ruin he is simply setting forth the old process of divine retribution known from tragedy, whereby ὕβρις, insolence, ends in ἀτμή, disaster. For it is exactly here that the conclusion reached earlier applies, namely, that the larger social forces which Thucydides saw at work in his own times and thought would be repeated in the future take the place of the gods in the *History*. Thus it is against the background of these, to him, comprehensible forces, rather than against the background of the inscrutable gods, that the drama of the *History* unrolls. In spite of its dark colors, it is therefore a drama that is based on confidence in men's powers, not doubt of them. Certainly it is a drama played on a purely mundane level, where the larger forces that act on man are at least part of his world and to some degree within his control. As a result, though Thucydides uses the means of tragedy to bring out the interplay between these forces and their

⁵¹ Cornford, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-152.

human agents and though the pattern that he draws is one of blindness ending in ruin, still the substance of that pattern is the substance of history, not of drama. Aristotle in the *Poetics*⁵² called tragedy more philosophic than history, on the ground that tragedy was capable of revealing the inner relationships of human life, whereas history was not. But this judgment, like much else in Aristotle, takes no account of Thucydides. For he, as clearly as any tragedian, indeed as any Greek author, possessed that greatest of Greek abilities, the ability to observe the actualities of life with unflinching candor, yet at the same time, without falsifying these actualities, to reduce them to their generic and hence their lasting patterns. To have performed this feat both of record and of simplification on a plane of strict reality, and at a time when the basic political ideals of western man were at issue, is Thucydides' monumental triumph.

⁵² 1451b 6.

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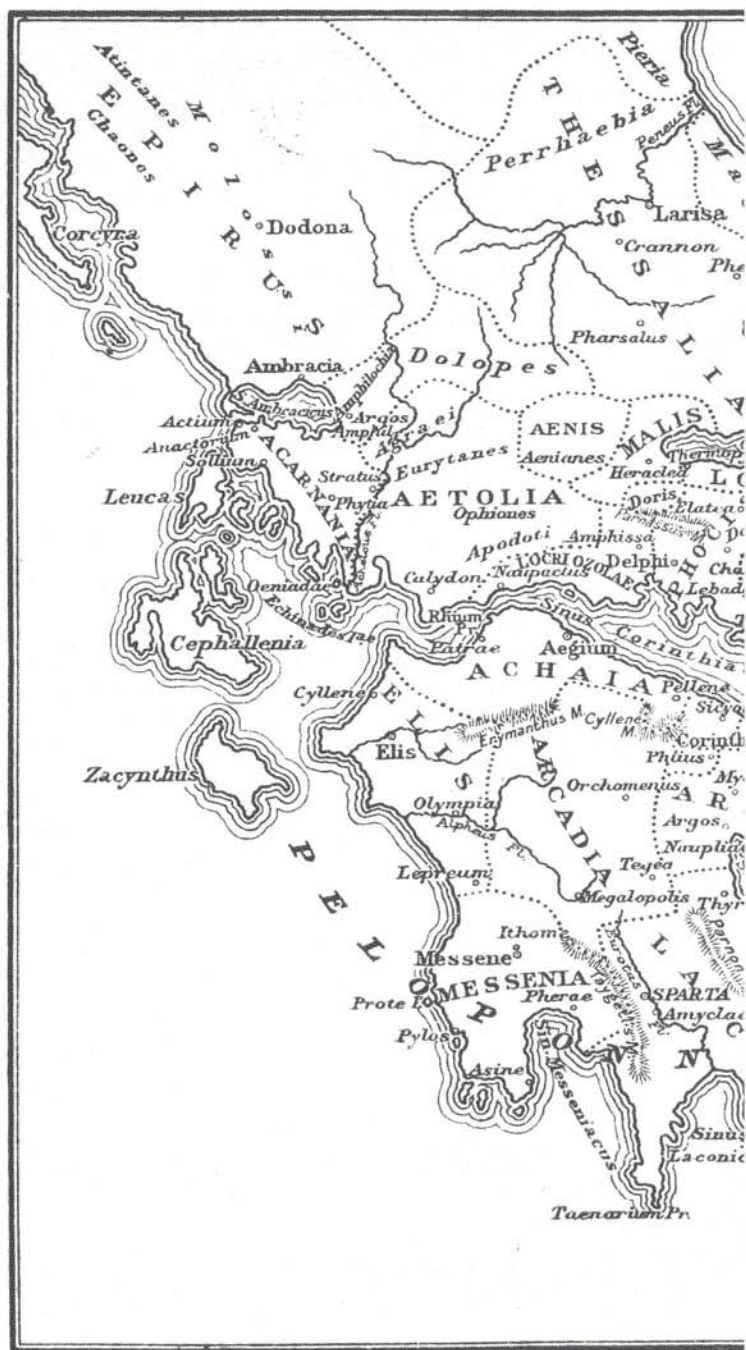
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English Miles

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Stadia

0 100 200 300 400 500 600



